

LISTENING TO BABBITT:
PERCEPTION AND ANALYSIS OF MILTON BABBITT'S
DU FOR SOPRANO AND PIANO

by

ERIN L. SULLIVAN

(Under the Direction of Adrian Childs and Susan Thomas)

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the ways in which scholars can approach and meaningfully discuss the music of Milton Babbitt. Critics argue that the standard discourse constructs a binary division between how Babbitt's music *works* and how it *sounds*—that is, the system-based analytical approach engenders an attitude that the only elements of Babbitt's music warranting serious consideration are theoretical conceptions, not aural perceptions. An examination of Babbitt's writings will reveal the motivations for, and importance of, this system-based discourse in the analysis of “contextual” musical languages. However, this rhetoric has its limitations as well, thus the second part of this paper offers an alternative, listening-based approach to Babbitt's music by exploring the vivid interplay of compositional structures, poetic text, and perceived meaning of musical gestures in Babbitt's song cycle, *Du* (1951). This paper concludes by suggesting possible means of reconciling aural perceptions and compositional structures within a larger framework of serial poetics.

INDEX WORDS: Milton Babbitt, Serialism, Music Theory, Music Analysis, Music Discourse, *Du*, Song Cycle, American Music

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INTRODUCTION

The standard discourse¹ associated with the music of Milton Babbitt has received considerable attention from critics, arguably more attention than the music itself. The aspersions wielded at Babbitt and like-minded theorists—cries of “musical parsing,” “academicism,” and even “fanatical scientism”—suggest that this discourse, like his music, is widely perceived as being “for, of, and by specialists.”² However, despite their distaste for these recondite analyses, many of the same critics consistently acknowledge the overall appeal—or at least the historical

¹ As will become clearer over the course of this paper, the “standard discourse” I am examining forms a tenuous category; it has incorporated a plurality of discursive styles and approaches over the years. Yet the received view of traditional post-tonal theory and analysis, particularly as traced to its chief polemicist, Milton Babbitt, is consistently criticized. Thus my discussion of the “standard discourse” equates to an investigation of what this discourse has come to represent, for better or for worse.

² The quote is extracted from Milton Babbitt’s infamous 1958 article, “The Composer as Specialist,” assigned the more inflammatory title “Who Cares if You Listen?” and reprinted in *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*, ed. Stephen Peles with Stephen Dembski, Andrew Mead, and Joseph N. Straus (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003), 48-54. (Hereafter all citations of Babbitt’s articles will refer to this collection.) I am not asserting here that the technical nature of this discourse is necessarily problematic, only that other methods for studying this music have yet to be explored, as will be discussed further in this paper. The aforementioned criticisms were extracted from the following more lengthy quotes:

“Babbitt’s Second String Quartet, [Paul Griffith] says, ‘is based on an all-interval series which is introduced interval by interval, as it were, with each new arrival initiating a development of the interval repertory acquired thus far, each development being argued in terms of derived sets.’ This comes close to what George Bernard Shaw dismissed as ‘parsing’ and parodied with an ‘analysis’ of ‘To be or not to be.’ Shakespeare, as he says, ‘announces his subject at once in the infinitive, in which mood it is presently repeated after a short connecting passage in which, brief as it is, we recognize the alternative and negative forms on which so much of the significance of repetition depends.’ Musical parsing is far more defensible now than it was in Shaw’s time—styles vary so much that musical grammar can’t be taken for granted—but Griffiths does too much of it. He doesn’t say how the structures he talks about really work—just how do derived sets ‘argue’ (whatever that means) each new ‘development’? ... This isn’t entirely his fault, though, because Babbitt talks about music the same way.” Greg Sandow, “A Fine Madness,” *The Pleasure of Modernist Music*, ed. Arved Ashby (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 253-258.

“What seems equally clear, however, is that this theorizing and dogged, bar-by-bar analysis has become obsessive and ‘academic’ in the most invidious sense. A number of the leading figures of this group have spoken out strongly against such pedantry—among them their dean, Roger Sessions. These critics are only following the lead of Schoenberg himself, who continually ridiculed admirers who could see the twelve-tone system only as an opportunity for row counting.” John Rockwell, *All American Music* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997): 30.

“[Babbitt’s] writings of the 1950s had developed into a strange amalgam. Conjoined with a fanatical scientism, a search for quasi-logical precision of reference which tortured his syntax into increasingly Jamesian spirals for very un-Jamesian ends, there was an undertone of distress, even rage, erupting into repeated assaults and innuendos directed against various predictable targets.” Joseph Kerman, *Contemplating Music* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985), 100.

import—of Babbitt’s compositions.³ An irreconcilable divide, we are led to believe, exists between the ways in which Babbitt’s music is discussed and the ways in which it is experienced.

This supposed disconnect between the listening experience and its verbal representations is not exclusive to integral serialism; these discrepancies pervade musical thought, from program notes to Schenkerian graphs and pitch-class analyses.⁴ Yet the discourse attributed to Babbitt and much of his academic theory milieu has invited a particularly vehement strain of criticism.⁵ Babbitt’s writings have come to embody the goals, methods, and language adopted by many scholars in the years immediately following World War Two, and this discourse, particularly as

³ “There’s no point in thinking that Babbitt should do or think anything but what he does; I wouldn’t want to be without his theoretical essays or his often unjustly scorned, often blindly praised, unsettling, provocative, infuriating, airy, light-hearted, deeply felt, and (on third or fourth hearing) irresistible music. But I can’t help thinking that he’s sold himself short by trying both to extend the boundaries of his art and to remain academically respectable, and by acknowledging only the verifiable (and therefore trivial) aspects of his amazing work.” Sandow, “A Fine Madness,” 258.

“With Babbitt, it is not always clear what the balance between intellectual adventure and compositional instinct really is. That so many of his scores, especially when they at last receive accurate and impassioned performances, ‘work’ without prior knowledge suggests that the juices of inspiration still run strong in his veins.” Rockwell, *All American Music*, 30.

“Folk wisdom attributes similar habits of mind to musicians and mathematicians, but few musicians can comfortably thread their way through Babbitt’s more difficult papers or those of certain of his students. No branch of music theory since the Middle Ages has given so strong an impression of curling away from the experience of music into the far reaches of the theorists’ intellects. The impression is deceptive, of course, because the theory is intimately implicated with music that is composed—some of it music of unquestioned stature. That is the strength of the theory, and the source of its prestige. Even though the 1970s and 1980s have witnessed a reaction against avant-garde serialism, there are few serious critics who are inclined to write of Babbitt’s own music.” Kerman, *Contemplating Music*, 99.

⁴ See Nicholas Cook, *Music, Imagination, and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990).

⁵ My word choice here should be noted. It is my opinion that Babbitt knowingly “invited” criticism, and his at times indecorous replies to such criticism did not change over the course of his career. Although Joseph N. Straus has argued that the perception of Babbitt as despotic leader of the “serial tyranny” is in many ways a myth, there is no doubt that his discourse consistently attracted (and still attracts) ample criticism. See Joseph N. Straus, “Babbitt and Stravinsky under the Serial ‘Regime,’” *Perspectives of New Music* 35, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 17-32 and “The Myth of Serial ‘Tyranny,’” *The Musical Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 301-343. Fred Everett Maus suggests that “the scientific tone of Babbitt’s music-theoretical work ... can be seen as a kind of closeting. ... Theory and analysis, as Babbitt practiced them, seek impersonality and objectivity, and while many theorists have followed Babbitt in this, many other people have found such writing to be a bizarre response to music. Rather than taking Babbitt’s approach to theory as a complete and accurate reflection of his musical world, I think it is promising to interpret the writing pragmatically as a mark of self-division.” Fred Everett Maus, “Sexual and Musical Categories,” *The Pleasure of Modernist Music*, ed. Arved Ashby (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 169.

employed in the analysis of contemporary compositions,⁶ brings to the fore the challenges and politics of creating meaningful accounts of music.

This paper takes as its starting point the controversy surrounding Babbitt's writings on music because how we talk about music says profound things about what we value in music, and this is ultimately a paper about expressing meaningful appreciation of Babbitt's compositional style. The following argument is largely motivated by personal intuitions that there exist vital elements of Babbitt's music that are rendered ineffable in the current discourse. To uncover these elusive elements requires a critical review of Babbitt's analytical articles and the criticism they accrued.

While critics at times misrepresent Babbitt's intentions, their complaints merit further attention than is allotted by Babbitt's terse dismissal of *argumentum ad populum*.⁷ I would like to propose that the criticism of Babbitt's discourse actually circles around a far more nuanced and problematic issue involving the very nature of post-tonal composition. That is, the perceived disconnect between how the music *sounds* and how it *works* reflects the compositional challenges of establishing musical syntax within a self-defined ("contextual") system—an issue that Babbitt has explored in great detail over the course of his career. Both Babbitt's explanations of the twelve-tone system and critics' calls for a more humanistic approach to the musical surface are essential for offering an account of the vivid and potentially rewarding act of listening to Babbitt's music. It is my intent that, by first working through the criticism

⁶ The terminology used to describe twentieth-century music is often inconsistent and problematic. Strictly for purposes of linguistic variety, I will employ the adjectives "post-war," "contemporary," "modern," and "new" in reference to the music of Babbitt and his contemporaries. Granted, a composition like *Du*, which will be discussed at length in Chapter Two, was composed over a half century ago, but in terms of a musicological study of this music, it can still be considered contemporary and modern. I will, however, be more explicit in labeling musical styles within the post-tonal repertoire: "atonal," "twelve-tone," and "serial" music have clear definitions, although some overlap of categories does exist. The even more precise classification of Babbitt's compositions as music that unfolds in aggregates will be discussed later in this paper.

⁷ Milton Babbitt, "More Than The Sounds of Music," *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*, 384.

surrounding this discourse, I may be able to offer an approach to Babbitt's music that encapsulates the evocative nature of both the system and the surface.

In Chapter One I examine Babbitt's approach to serial analysis and his insistence on the compositional system as a means for understanding and evaluating a work's individual musical language. Investigation into both the rewards and the limitations of this system-based analytical approach leads to the decisive issue of how one listens to Babbitt's compositions—within and/or without the twelve-tone system. Criticism of the discourse will guide my development of a possible analytical approach that does not depend on substantiation by the twelve-tone system. This approach to Babbitt's music is radically reoriented toward the processual, listening experience and utilizes concepts of musical gesture and agency to inform and directly shape analysis of the work.

Central to this paper is a formulation by J. K. Randall that “‘perceiving’ music is (and ought to be) a process of inventing structures out of aural impressions derived not merely from ‘perceived sound’ but from sound perceived in whatever way best appeases our lust for inventing structures.”⁸ Following Joseph Dubiel, who has suggested on several occasions that the role of the twelve-tone system in our understanding of a piece may not warrant the ontological primacy it is generally awarded,⁹ this alternative approach explores other possible means of “‘inventing structures” from perceptions of Babbitt's music.

Chapter Two offers an analysis of Babbitt's 1951 song cycle, *Du*, for soprano and piano. Applying the approach developed at the end of Chapter One, this analysis explores elements of

⁸ J. K. Randall, “A Report from Princeton,” *Perspectives of New Music* 3, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1965): 85. Quoted in Joseph Dubiel, “Three Essays on Milton Babbitt (Part Two),” *Perspectives of New Music* 29, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 118, n. 5.

⁹ Dubiel's work on Babbitt has significantly influenced this paper. In addition to the article cited above, see his “Three Essays on Milton Babbitt (Part One),” *Perspectives of New Music* 28, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 216-261; “Three Essays on Milton Babbitt (Part Three),” *Perspectives of New Music* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 82-131; and “What's the Use of the Twelve-Tone System?” *Perspectives of New Music* 35, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 33-51.

text setting and perceived meaning of musical gestures, as they play out over the course of the work. With this “listening-based” approach to Babbitt’s music I am not attempting to cater to the “inexperienced listener,” nor am I making assumptions about the aural capabilities of the “experienced listener.” Rather, I present an interpretation of the work that reflects my subjectivities as analyst/listener, which features discussions of musical personae created in the context of each song.

In Chapter Three I return to the alleged divide between discussions of a work’s underlying structure and experience of its musical surface that first motivated this study. A comparison of my Chapter Two reading of *Du* with elements of its compositional structure suggests that the “how-it-works versus how-it-sounds” dichotomy does not do justice to the brilliantly elaborate interrelationship between system and surface that words can only begin to convey. I conclude with a proposal for future research moving toward a meaningful discourse on Babbitt’s serial poetics.

CHAPTER ONE

The Musical Discourse of/on Milton Babbitt

Babbitt's often-polemic statements on musical discourse, particularly his proposal of a "scientific" language, have definitively shaped the ways in which scholars approach music. There exist many claims of what this "scientific" discourse stands for,¹⁰ but they are largely based on perceptions of Babbitt's theoretical articles and his pointed comments about discourse, not what he actually says about his music. So while numerous scholars have expounded upon the nature of musical analysis,¹¹ an exact definition of this brand of analysis practiced by Babbitt and so many other post-war theorists remains difficult to form.

Naturally, I am hesitant to make generalizations about any body of literature; but the "standard analytical discourse" about Babbitt's music represents for many a particular methodological approach and underlying philosophy. A comprehensive survey of the over fifty years of resulting music-theoretical literature is beyond the scope of this paper, but an examination of pertinent articles by Babbitt will establish an ideological framework in which to situate my proposed analytical project: an exploration of the many ways in which listeners can perceive, conceptualize, and relate to Babbitt's music.

In this chapter I will argue that the controversy surrounding this discourse is not so much over the technical language involved, as over the critical values implicit in Babbitt's analytical

¹⁰ According to Babbitt, "it only need be insisted here that our concern is not whether music has been, is, can be, will be, or should be a 'science,' whatever that may be assumed to mean, but simply that statements about music must conform to those verbal and methodological requirements which attend the possibility of meaningful discourse in any domain." Milton Babbitt, "Past and Present Concepts of the Nature and Limits of Music," *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*, 78.

¹¹ See Ian D. Bent and Anthony Pople, "Analysis," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 20 February 2005), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>.

statements. Further, a focus on the compositional system in some analytical articles has resulted in a perceived rift between how a composition *works* and how it *sounds*. By deconstructing this apparent dichotomy and its implied preference of objectivity over subjectivity, I will attempt to establish a means for introducing other voices into the discourse on Babbitt's music.

I. Theory and Analysis

The breadth of subjects Babbitt has commented on is extensive, addressing the areas of music theory, analysis, and criticism. I employ here David Lewin's distinction between theory—the study of how abstract structures function within a given “sound universe”—and analysis—the study of individual compositions.¹² Babbitt's theoretical articles are landmarks in post-tonal thought, which meticulously formalize a musical system based on the logical precepts of mathematical group theory and concomitantly codify a language for labeling such compositional structures. This musical system, an expansion of Arnold Schoenberg's methods of twelve-tone composition, provides resources for both the creation and the analysis of serial works. In the years since Schoenberg's innovation, the introduction of new compositional languages—new “sound universes,” often varying from piece to piece—was paralleled by the development of theoretical constructs, which in turn facilitated original analyses of modern compositions. Thus Babbitt's metatheoretical project sought “a higher-level theory, constructed purely logically from the empirical acts of examination of the individual compositions.”¹³

At the same time, however, theoretical conceptions were also cultivated as guiding structures in the composition of new works. It is likely that most of Babbitt's theoretical

¹² David Lewin, “Behind the Beyond: A Response to Edward T. Cone,” *Perspectives of New Music* 7, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 1969): 59-69. Joseph Kerman takes up this well documented debate two decades later, as part of his ongoing call for a return to musical criticism. See Kerman, *Contemplating Music*, 61-112.

¹³ Milton Babbitt, “The Structure and Function of Musical Theory,” *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*, 191.

developments were largely inspired by his own compositional endeavors—an observation furthered by Benjamin Boretz’s claim that “the invention of musical systems is in itself ... part of the creative process.”¹⁴ Simply put, it is not that modern compositions have become more theoretical, but that modern theories have become more compositional.¹⁵ This interrelationship of composition, theory, and analysis, embodied by the post-war phenomenon of the university composer-theorist of which Babbitt is exemplar, contributes significantly to the debate over contemporary music discourse, as will be discussed throughout this chapter.¹⁶

Within analysis, Babbitt’s inquiries span a variety of tonal and post-tonal idioms, and aim to illustrate the detailed inner-workings and far-reaching structural manifestations of a given musical system.¹⁷ Accounts of his own works establish his system of aggregate formation via arrays and examine the specific set structures and transformations chosen from the manifold possibilities inherent in the system. These intricate analyses, like his compositions, present the associations among theoretical conceptions on myriad levels. Babbitt, however, has seldom published analyses of his own works, aside from excerpts incorporated into theoretical articles as

¹⁴ Referenced in Kerman, *Contemplating Music*, 99. According to Rockwell, Boretz calls Babbitt’s “theoretical inventions ... the principal substance of Babbitt’s creative accomplishment.” Rockwell, *All American Music*, 26. Judith Lochhead addresses Babbitt’s conflation of musical system with composition in “Refiguring the Modernist Program for Hearing: Steve Reich and George Rochberg,” *The Pleasure of Modernist Music*, ed. Arved Ashby (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 330-331.

¹⁵ “The demand of contemporary composers has been for the formulation of *adequate* theoretical principles, principles in conformity with what they know and need empirically, and capable of accounting for and supporting all the complexity, depth, and scope of what is musically actual, potential, and problematic.” Benjamin Boretz and Edward T. Cone, eds., *Perspectives on Contemporary Music Theory* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), vii.

¹⁶ See Joseph Dubiel, “Composer, Theorist, Composer/Theorist,” *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 262-283.

¹⁷ Babbitt’s published analyses include “The String Quartets of Bartók” (1949), “Edgard Varèse: A Few Observations of his Music” (1966), “Three Essays on Schoenberg” (1968), “On *Relata I*” (1970) and “Stravinsky’s Verticals and Schoenberg’s Diagonals: A Twist of Fate” (1987), all published in *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*. Additional analytical comments with definite pedagogical motivations can be found in *Words about Music*, ed. Stephen Dembski and Joseph N. Straus (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987). These lectures include insights into both Schenkerian and serial theories.

means for demonstrating his explanative system.¹⁸ One significant exception is his 1970 article “On *Relata I*,” which addresses aspects of temporal and pitch structure and what he calls the “unfolding of twelve-part ‘polyphony’” in his *Relata I* for orchestra.¹⁹

On *Relata I*

In the introduction to the article, Babbitt asserts his goal for analysis: “[J]ust as I, as a composer, compose for me, as a listener, that which I would like to hear, so I, as an analyst, shall attempt to discover and formulate that which I, as a listener, would like to know.”²⁰ Upon examination of this article, it becomes evident that those elements that Babbitt, as a listener, would like to know involve the various ways in which the twelve-tone set manifests itself in the work and serves as a point of reference for conceptualizing the abundant transformations of spatially- and temporally-ordered pitch structures. I will mainly focus on the first section of Babbitt’s analysis in order to demonstrate how these elements function within the work and how this knowledge relates to the listening experience.

After providing a litany of background details (composition and premiere dates, duration, performance forces, instrumental groupings, and tempo), Babbitt dedicates a lengthy paragraph to the first eight measures of *Relata I*. There he indicates how the opening passage serves to introduce the work’s main features: pitch structures (relations between pitch classes and transformations of these relationships), temporal ordering, dynamic range, and total orchestral

¹⁸ In this sense, approaching the music in order to validate theoretical propositions cannot be considered analysis. See Lewin, “Behind the Beyond,” 62.

¹⁹ Milton Babbitt, “On *Relata I*,” *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*, 244.

²⁰ Babbitt, “On *Relata I*,” 238. Dubiel points out that Babbitt’s statement is “susceptible of a subtle reading, ... for what he ‘as a listener, would like to *know*’ may not be what he, as a listener would like to hear—however handily it may, as knowledge, help with the hearing, or however urgently he, as the composer, needed to know it.” Dubiel, “Three Essays on Milton Babbitt,” 248. Perhaps we should look instead to Lewin’s poignant sentiment that “whatever the use to which analysis is put (theoretical, historical, the acquisition of compositional craft, aid in preparing a performance), its goal is simply *to hear the piece better*, both in detail and in the large.” Lewin, “Behind the Beyond,” 63. (Emphasis original.)

forces. Babbitt partitions these eight measures into four subsections, each highlighting a timbral family (woodwinds, brass, pitched percussion, and strings). For example, the first subsection features the woodwinds sustaining a twelve-tone chord,

stated as two temporally overlapping hexachords, while the remaining three timbral families, in rhythmic coordination, present the other three twelve-tone transformations of the spatially ordered, sustained twelve-tone chord, cumulatively in three short attacks, supporting the entrance of the first hexachord, the second hexachord, and the conclusion of the first chord.²¹

Despite the tedium inherent in narrating any musical excerpt, Babbitt's writing is both descriptive and interpretive of the passage's aural realization. On the descriptive level, the above quote first draws the listener's attention to the opening texture, where sustained chords in the woodwinds are distinguished from the simultaneities of the accompaniment. The placement of the three attacks draws attention to the two overlapping hexachords in the woodwinds, which suggests the importance of this partitioning and possibly the function of the sustained twelve-tone chord as some sort of structural entity.²² Babbitt confirms this interpretation by initially labeling the woodwind chord as the referential set, and spatiotemporally relating it to the accompanying set forms and to the three additional appearances of the sustained chord as it travels, transformed, through the other timbral families. This explanation of musical structure leads Babbitt to claim "already there appears to be sufficient evidence to suggest that the composition employs the common practice syntax of the twelve-tone, or twelve-pitch-class, system."²³

²¹ Babbitt, "On *Relata I*," 239.

²² The fact that Babbitt highlights the twelve-tone chord in his composition is no guarantee that it is functioning as a structural entity. In many of Babbitt's works, the twelve-tone set is not necessarily evident in the opening measure, nor is it manifested on only one linear, surface level. For example, Babbitt offers an account of the opening clarinet solo of his *Composition for Four Instruments*, which an analyst interpreted as *the row*, when in reality it is an expression of four registrally distinct trichords. The clarinet solo's pitch ordering serves "as a referential source far deeper than that which appears on the immediate surface." See Babbitt, *Words about Music*, 28.

²³ Babbitt, "On *Relata I*," 240.

While the observations on texture and instrumental partitioning clearly describe elements of the musical surface, the latter comments on set structure and transformations interpret the relationships among musical phenomena. Babbitt devotes significant time to explaining these abstractions of the opening eight measures precisely in order to establish a system and syntax for interpreting the work's musical language, namely the unfolding of aggregates within the twelve-tone system. It remains to be shown how placing the music in this context will shape overall comprehension of the piece.

“Contextuality” and the Twelve-Tone System

Babbitt suggests on numerous occasions that the “problem” with contemporary music is that works are significantly “contextual.”²⁴ By this he means the musical language of a given composition is entirely self-referential and self-contained. Each work defines its structural materials within itself, with little or no connection to other works. As a result, “contextuality” places the burden of appreciating contemporary music almost entirely on the listener, without the benefit of familiar musical gestures or structures.²⁵ Babbitt offers the analogy:

Imagine you're listening to a tape of a language that you have never heard in your life and of which you know nothing. It has no relation to any language that you know at all, so you cannot possibly extrapolate in any way whatsoever from any of your past language knowledge or habits. You're asked just to define the segmentations of this language, to discover when words end, or what are the phonemes of the language, or any of the primitive building blocks of the language. Just imagine the problem involved and imagine either the kind of approaches you might take to hearing it, or the approaches a person might take in order to finally get some notion of the purely syntactical nature (not, of course, the semantic nature) of this particular language.²⁶

²⁴ Babbitt originally employed this term to describe Schoenberg's freely atonal (pre-serial) works. However, “contextual” is now widely used to refer to any work that defines its musical structures within itself.

²⁵ “The limits of music reside ultimately in the perceptual capacities of the human receptor, just as the scope of physical science is delimited by the perceptual and conceptual capacities of the human observer.” Babbitt, “Past and Present Concepts of the Nature and Limits of Music,” 84.

²⁶ Babbitt, *Words About Music*, 171-172. Lewin develops this concept further: “In the analysis of a tonal piece, the nature of the sound-universe can usually be safely left implicit: ‘everyone knows’ enough about tonality nowadays so that the analyst can count on fairly common recognition of the theoretical notions he is invoking. In the analysis

The lack of a common understanding of musical language—in Babbitt’s terms, the lack of “communality”—poses numerous problems for comprehending, and discussing, modern music. Babbitt makes it clear, however, that he is not concerned about interpreting the meanings (semantic nature) of each contextual musical language, only defining its structures (syntactical nature). Hence one of the main goals of his theoretical articles was to establish a communal language for mapping out the syntactic structures of twelve-tone works.

Situating *Relata I* in the communal system of serial theory insures the function of certain pitch transformations and the relevance of the twelve-tone set, the aggregate, as the smallest invariant element, the constant unit of harmonic succession. Beyond these basic properties of the system lies a host of possible manifestations that play out within the composition. Thus Babbitt chooses to analyze the specific (contextually-defined) aspect of aggregate formation through a generalized array structure in *Relata I*. He writes:

The work’s twelve-tone set, that singular precompositional conjunction of the systematically generic and the compositionally unique, is explicitly interpreted and compositionally projected, then, by two independent components of the work—the twelve timbral lines, and the forty-eight instrumental lines—but its structure pervades every aspect of the composition, from the most local “harmony” to the associatively defined dependencies and contingencies of harmonic succession, through the structure of the total, ensemble aggregates, of the instrumentally formed aggregates, including the interrelation and progression of these aggregates, to the structure of the whole, its surface patterns and “form,” its cumulative subsumptions.²⁷

The referential twelve-tone set establishes actual pitch relationships, and, in conjunction with the generalized array, guides the unfolding of aggregates. The way in which the aggregate

of a serial work, however (or of works from other historical periods and/or cultures), we are in the uncomfortable position of ‘knowing’ (I mean intuitively, not intellectually) that there is an important theoretical context involved, while having only a relatively vague sense of how that context is interacting with the specific events of the piece. In this situation, an analyst finds himself continually conjecturing on the structural ‘meaning’ (in that context) of the gestures the piece makes, where in a tonal piece, such ‘meanings’ are much more apparent, and can safely be coded in such terms as ‘half-cadence,’ ‘tonic arrival,’ ‘passing harmony,’ etc.” Lewin, “Behind the Beyond,” 63.

²⁷ Babbitt, “On *Relata I*,” 247.

is manifested between the timbral families and instrumental lines is a specific product of Babbitt's compositional decisions. By focusing on the presentation of the aggregate on multiple levels, he is able to highlight "the extraordinary breadth and depth of the twelve-tone system,"²⁸ and provide a framework for establishing possible musical relationships. This system, however, is only a framework; the abstract concepts suggest possibilities but cannot predict the actual musical surface.²⁹ This emphasis on the system over the surface details fuels the perception of a divide between *works* and *sounds*, but Babbitt explains that

to direct a listener's attention to the unique aspects of a work, particularly when he probably knows the work little or not at all, and is likely to hear it in the near future little if at all, is to emphasize that which will provide least aid in initial comprehension, for—to such a listener—uniqueness is far less significantly helpful than is communality, however far removed from the immediate musical foreground such shared characteristics may be. Indications of the procedural sources, the technical traditions ... provide not only a point of entry but, eventually, the bases for determining the depth, extent, and genuineness of the work's originality.³⁰

By situating the composition within his twelve-tone system, Babbitt offers the listener "a point of entry" from which the work's more specific manifestations (set structure, pitch-class relations) can be conceptualized. By drawing attention to the formation of aggregates on both the linear level (the sustained twelve-tone chord that appears once in each timbral family) and the vertical level (the summation of the other three families' attacks), Babbitt establishes a process for navigating the remainder of the piece. As the work progresses, the spatially-ordered

²⁸ Milton Babbitt, "Some Aspects of Twelve-Tone Composition," *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*, 45.

²⁹ Dubiel explains that Babbitt's twelve-tone system is not a set of compositional constraints, but compositional provocations—"occasion[s] to think of things one 'never would have thought of.'" Dubiel, "Three Essays on Milton Babbitt (Part Two)," 91. Paralleling Dubiel's comments on the subject, Nicholas Cook interprets the twelve-tone system as a "compositional heuristic," that is, "a mechanism for creating new and possibly interesting sound-combinations to be validated empirically through listening." He cautions, however, that the system cannot be "regarded as a means of making generally valid predictions the manner in which music is experienced by the listener." Cook, *Music, Imagination and Culture*, 231-232.

³⁰ Babbitt, "On *Relata I*," 237. I will return to this interpretation of the system as a means for judging a work's originality in my discussion of criticism in the next section.

chords will be linearized, and transformations of the now temporally-ordered sets will become more readily evident.³¹

Yet two closely-related problems arise from this system-based approach: the difficulty hearing these analytical observations, and the question of whether these statements are in fact necessary to understand the contextual musical language. These challenges will be taken up in the following sections.

“Hearing” Analysis

It could be (and likely is) argued that most listeners cannot aurally discern the transformations of the opening spatially-ordered chord discussed by Babbitt in “On *Relata I*.” Music cognition studies could be called upon to discredit many of Babbitt’s analytical statements as imperceptible and thus extraneous to the listener, but this does not negate the way in which the musical system gives meaning to certain aural perceptions and, more importantly, illuminates dimensions of possible hearing.³² If we were limited to the purely perceptible elements of the music, the opening passage could have been described as a “sustained block of sound” in the woodwinds that is accompanied by three attacks of thick chords played by the other instruments. The woodwind part could be heard as consisting of an initial articulation of a chord that is sustained upon the entry of a second chord. Additionally, one could detect that the relative density of the accompanying chords increases over the span of three attacks and that the dynamics swell. Finally, this initial gesture is clearly repeated another three times, with the

³¹ “On *Relata I*” details this unfolding of aggregates extensively but I will confine my formal discussion of the article to the passages already mentioned.

³² For an extensive bibliography including several cognition studies relating to the perception of serial music, see Cook, *Music, Imagination and Culture*, 244-257. For an engaging account of analysis and interpretation of contemporary music, see Arved Ashby, “Intention and Meaning in Modernist Music,” *The Pleasure of Modernist Music*, ed. Arved Ashby (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 25-45.

sustained part (originally played by woodwinds) subsequently taken up by strings, brass, and finally pitched percussion.³³

This cognitively-plausible analysis, although seemingly less prestigious than Babbitt's in terms of nomenclature and scope, conveys an accurate description of the passage by discerning changes in instrumentation, dynamics, and texture. But the labeling of musical features conveys very little about how these perceptions function within the larger work; that is, the perceived sounds lack a larger context in which to be interpreted.³⁴ Granted, the listener would have greater difficulty following the "twelve-tone transformations of the spatially ordered, sustained twelve-tone chord" than tracking the "sustained block of sound," but a complete analysis in the latter style would do little to aid the listener's overall comprehension of the piece beyond listing a series of sounds to be heard.³⁵ Perhaps a larger narrative scheme could be formulated that successfully relates the "blocks of sound," but as it currently stands, the analysis is easy to hear, but does little to locate the music within a context.

³³ In his "Three Essays on Milton Babbitt" (Part One), Joseph Dubiel undertakes a similar study of what Babbitt's arrays actually tell us about their functions within the music and how the analyst can distinguish "between the incontestably obvious and the perversely arcane" manifestations of the array (242). Dubiel compares two analyses of Babbitt's *Sextet*: the first, a non-theoretical approach, and the second focusing on arrays. The first analysis speaks of the passage in terms of textural contrasts, non-specific intervals, dynamics, ranges, contour, articulation, and the interplay between piano and violin. In the subsequent, more technical analysis, the discussion of arrays does parallel some (not all) of what was perceived in the first analysis, but also adds much more. See Dubiel, "Three Essays on Milton Babbitt," 235-243.

³⁴ To clarify, I do not mean to denigrate the second perspective as "*mere* description" in contrast to Babbitt's "analysis," a distinction that Dubiel argues is ultimately not useful in comparing discourse. Rather, I find this "block of sound" approach limited because it fails to codify and enrich my hearing of the piece. See Joseph Dubiel, "Analysis, Description, and What Really Happens," *Music Theory Online* 6, no. 2. See also Lewin's critique of Cook's cognitively-plausible analysis of Stockhausen's *Klavierstück III*: "I get the message that I can be perfectly at home with my listening if only I listen in a common-sense fashion for contours and registers and densities, and apply to those experiences some casual inferences from received notions about arch shapes, upbeats, etc. In this way I will hear that (and how) Stockhausen's piece, except for quirks in its notation, is quite traditional and comfortable; it will not challenge me, or provoke me, or in some ways infuriate me. I can see the point of encouraging inexperienced students to listen freely and to trust their ears at any stage of their training. But Stockhausen's piece does challenge me, and provoke me, and in some ways infuriate me, and make me want to extend my hearing--and that is precisely one of the most vital things it does to me." David Lewin, "Stockhausen's *Klavierstück III*," *Musical Form and Transformation: Four Analytic Essays* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993), 62.

³⁵ Again, Babbitt's analysis could also be considered a play-by-play of musical events, but the structures he introduces are concepts functioning within a system, not labels.

Babbitt is realistic enough to acknowledge that, in regards to his analysis, “all of these words depend for their comprehension and consequence on, at least, a knowledge of the printed score, and ultimately an auditory intimacy with the performed score.”³⁶ This is not to suggest that the only solution is mandatory score study and ear training for future audience members. But cognitive limitation is not a deterrence; Babbitt’s analysis simply provides one way of processing the aural input into a meaningful model. He writes:

When somebody says, “Can you hear these things?” [i.e. theoretical conceptions] the answer is that it’s not a matter of hearing. Of course you can hear these different notes. “Hearing” is one of those expressions that seems to represent a high degree of humanistic professionalism. *But it’s not a matter of hearing; it’s a matter of the way you think it through conceptually with your musical mind.*³⁷

Babbitt’s invocation of a “musical mind” is particularly revealing of his analytical goals. The details on set relations and aggregate formation are not simply explanations of the sonic reality; they equip the listener with a syntax facilitating interpretation (conceptualization) of the musical events. For example, the individual notes of a twelve-tone set are simple enough to *hear*. What is far more important to Babbitt in terms of appreciating music is how one conceives, or *conceptualizes*, what one hears. Thus hearing a string of all twelve pitch-classes does not compare to forming a mental concept of “aggregate” and conceiving how the aggregate delineates both local pitch grouping (linearly and vertically) and long-range formal sections.³⁸ For Babbitt, conceptualizing the structural elements of a work with one’s “musical mind”

³⁶ Babbitt, “On *Relata I*,” 253. Babbitt also concedes that the “performed score” often proves to be a poor actualization of the printed score; the premiere of *Relata I* was, in the composer’s words, “a profoundly unsatisfactory representation of the work; in the last of the three public performances—therefore, the most “rehearsed”—only about 80 percent of the notes of the composition were played at all, and only about 60 percent of these were played accurately, and only about 40 percent of these were played with any regard for dynamic values.” Babbitt, “On *Relata I*,” 256.

³⁷ Babbitt, *Words About Music*, 23. (Emphasis added.)

³⁸ For a discussion of how Babbitt indicates formal divisions in his music, see William E. Lake, “Listening for Large-Scale Form in the Music of Milton Babbitt,” *Contemporary Music Forum* 2 (1990): 11-19. For an insightful article on hearing and conceptualizing Babbitt’s music from its primitive elements to larger structural relationships, see Joseph N. Straus, “Listening to Babbitt,” *Perspectives of New Music* 24, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1986): 10-25.

involves assigning meaning to the musical process, or as Andrew Mead says, turning a sound into a signal.³⁹

Mead uses “signal” to mean noise that, through listening, somehow “makes sense.”⁴⁰ I assume the process of “making sense” out of noise involves not just labeling sounds, but “inventing structures” within a system, and is akin to “interpreting” or “conceptualizing” aural perceptions, as employed in this paper. Like Mead, I choose to view Babbitt’s music as signifying: a listener can “make sense” of the noise in many ways, and signification can occur regardless of composer intent. It is possible to conceptualize musical elements in ways that are not brought out in Babbitt’s analyses; the challenge then is to create a context (twelve-tone or otherwise) within which to relate and conceptualize these musical elements.

My *Relata I* analysis given above could be lengthened to include other critical observations about the initial eight measures—other ways in which the music “made sense” to me. The “sustained block of sound” adopts a different character within each timbral family. The final occurrence, played by pitched percussion, sounds to me strikingly weak and perhaps even comical in comparison to the other groups, due to the instruments’ lack of sustaining capacity. Babbitt’s analysis stresses homogeneity of musical elements by treating each transformation of the opening set as conceptually the same while failing to mention the various effects that distinguish these elements. In retrospect, it is possible that I found the final sustained chord “comical” specifically because I had read Babbitt’s analysis and had thus already conceptualized the four appearances of the chord being directly related. This particular instance suggests that there are means for reconciling the two analytical accounts: the compositional system provides a context for conceptualizing comical-sounding “sustained blocks of sounds,” and the system-

³⁹ See Andrew Mead, “‘One Man’s Signal Is Another Man’s Noise’: Personal Encounters with Post-Tonal Music,” *The Pleasure of Modernist Music*, ed. Arved Ashby (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 259-274.

⁴⁰ Mead, “One Man’s Signal,” 272.

based analytical observations can be enriched by discussions of expectation and even humor in Babbitt's music.

Through discussion of his musical system, Babbitt provides a means of "hearing a path" through the piece,⁴¹ but this certainly does not preclude additional hearings and analytical approaches. I would like to suggest, then, that one problem with Babbitt's analysis (if one is inclined to label it a "problem") is not that he presents musical elements subsisting far from the audible musical surface, but that he too often ignores or downplays those musical gestures that the listener can readily hear *and* conceptualize.

But what are we to make of all the theoretical conceptions that do *not* reflect aural perceptions? For some, Babbitt's discourse simply functions as an analytical panacea—a reassurance of compositional logic underlying the apparent chaos. For others, the plurality of possible pitch relationships that result from the system are part of the wonder of Babbitt's music:

Serial technique produces ever-new associations of familiar elements giving everything that happens the power of an omen. Following a Babbitt piece in close detail is like reading entrails or tea leaves; every rearrangement in every bar might mean something. So many rearrangements are possible that you never know what the omens really mean: new developments seem, if not arbitrary, then at least willful. This is a sort of higher-order zaniness, something unpredictable and even wild that transcends Babbitt's logic...⁴²

For those listeners who do not hear Babbitt's compositions as "chaos" or "higher-order zaniness," the music could be discussed in terms of yet other ways in which sound is being signified. For example, what musical gestures led performers to refer to Babbitt's music as "jazzy" or "like scat-singing"?⁴³ Or taking musical signification even further, what aspects of Babbitt's poignant text setting in *Philomel* prompted Susan McClary to read the work as an anti-

⁴¹ To borrow a phrase from Straus, "Listening to Babbitt," 11.

⁴² Sandow, "A Fine Madness," 256.

⁴³ And not just in reference to Babbitt's *All Set* for jazz ensemble: see Bethany Beardslee Winham, "Thoughts on 'I.B.' from 'L.W.'," *Perspectives of New Music* 14, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1976): 81; Judith Bettina and Randall Packer, "An Interview with Judith Bettina," *Perspectives of New Music* 24, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1986): 113.

rape statement “in which the victim is transformed into the nightingale to sing about both her suffering and her transcendence”?⁴⁴ To explore other aspects of this music—*that which I, as a listener, would like to know*—requires a fresh approach to musical analysis and criticism.

II. Music Criticism

In his compelling article, “A Fine Madness,” Sandow questions many of the premises underlying Babbitt’s discourse on contemporary music, and focuses on the disparity between accounts of how a composition works and how it sounds. He relates one such example, a lecture-recital in which

Babbitt spoke calmly, with his usual affable grace, about the structure of the music to come. But he didn’t prepare us for what we actually heard, at least not for the torrents of notes, jumping from one end of the piano to the other, shifting speed every few seconds (though the notated tempos are generally constant: changes in apparent speed are produced by difficult-to-perform and always varying subdivisions of the constant beat); he didn’t mention that his music lacks both regularity and any connection to everyday emotional and musical life.⁴⁵

On one level, the omissions in Babbitt’s lecture could be ascribed to the composer’s aesthetic values. Babbitt chose to focus on particular aspects of the work that differ from what Sandow views as the most noteworthy elements, or at least those that would be most beneficial to the listener.⁴⁶ This act of highlighting specific musical elements within a work equates to one type of criticism. According to Lewin, “implicit in every analysis ... is a criticism. The analyst chooses what to point out, in what order, in what way, and at what length to discuss what he is pointing out. Presumably, all of this reflects what ‘engages him’ about the work.”⁴⁷ Babbitt’s analyses are critical statements of his own aesthetic, illuminating what he values in a work, such

⁴⁴ Susan McClary, “Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition,” *Cultural Critique* 12 (Spring 1989): 75.

⁴⁵ Sandow, “A Fine Madness,” 256-257. This article originally appeared in *The Village Voice* on 16 March 1982.

⁴⁶ Or those which Sandow, as a listener, would like to know.

⁴⁷ Lewin, “Behind the Beyond,” 64.

as maximal variety in twelve-tone structure and transformations.⁴⁸ However, as Sandow points out, Babbitt's motivation for speaking more of structures than sounds has as much, if not more, to do with his staunch commitment to the principles of logical positivism and the empirically verifiable discourse it mandates.⁴⁹

Babbitt's "Meaningful" Discourse

Throughout his career, Babbitt dedicated extensive energy to the reform of how scholars use language to describe music. In 1965, for example, he charged that

the problems of our time certainly cannot be expressed in or discussed in what has passed generally for the language of musical discourse, that language in which the incorrigible personal statement is granted the grammatical form of an attributive [*sic*] proposition, and in which negation—therefore, does not produce a contradiction; that wonderful language which permits anything to be said and virtually nothing to be communicated.⁵⁰

The "incorrigible" statements on music that he deems utterly "meaningless" could adopt the following form: "There can be no question that in many of Mendelssohn's works there is missing that real depth that opens wide perspectives, the mysticism of the unutterable."⁵¹ Or further, the simple statement that the C-flat of measure 53 of the second movement of Mozart's Symphony no. 40 in G Minor, K. 550, is "an unexpected C-flat."⁵² Babbitt perceives these statements as communicating "virtually nothing" because they lack precision and supporting evidence. Thus, he proposes, "there is but one kind of language, one kind of method for the verbal formulation of 'concepts' and the verbal analysis of such formulations: 'scientific' language and 'scientific' method."⁵³

⁴⁸ Further study of how his aesthetic values are realized in his music is beyond the scope of this paper, which will focus on those critical statements made in his writings about music and about discourse.

⁴⁹ Sandow, "A Fine Madness," 253-254.

⁵⁰ Babbitt, "The Structure and Function of Musical Theory," 192.

⁵¹ Babbitt, "The Structure and Function of Musical Theory," 192.

⁵² Babbitt, "The Structure and Function of Musical Theory," 192.

⁵³ Babbitt, "Past and Present Concepts of the Nature and Limits of Music," 78.

Rooted in the philosophy of logical positivism, this “scientific” language would tolerate only those statements that are experientially deduced and logically sound.⁵⁴ The logical positivists’ “verification principle”—criteria for verifying statements as “meaningful”—establishes that “analytic knowledge derived from logical reasoning and empirical knowledge derived from experience” are the *only* sources of knowledge.⁵⁵ Babbitt insists further that the discourse “must satisfy criteria of intersubjectivity, which involve a definitional, reductional procedure.”⁵⁶ In other words, to achieve a discourse about music that is significant to any reader, observations must be well defined and unequivocally supported by apposite evidence.⁵⁷

For obvious reasons, establishing a communal language for discussing the plurality of post-war musical idioms is a daunting task. For Babbitt, a discourse centered on the twelve-tone system met the criteria of intersubjectivity, and thus his articles written in the 1960s and 70s focus considerable attention on the systematic codification of serial theory and related terminology. Because the theory is so closely tied to compositional procedures, the terminology he introduced largely became lingua franca for many composers wishing to discuss their craft. As will be addressed below, however, this rhetoric soon came to represent the intellectual conceit of an elite establishment, whose perceived hegemony dictated the ways in which scholars should approach modern music.

⁵⁴ The Logical Positivists, particularly Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, Otto Neurath, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Carl Hempel, factored significantly in Babbitt’s intellectual milieu. See John Lowell Brackett, Jr., “The Philosophy of Science as a Philosophy of Music Theory (Milton Babbitt, Benjamin Boretz, Michael Kassler, Matthew Brown)” (PhD diss.: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003), 1-12; and James A. Davis, “Philosophical Positivism and American Atonal Music Theory,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56, no. 3 (July 1995): 501-522. For more on the influence of mid-century philosophy on Babbitt’s theoretical project, see also Martin Brody, “‘Music for the Masses’: Milton Babbitt’s Cold War Music Theory,” *The Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 161-192.

⁵⁵ Brackett, “The Philosophy of Science as a Philosophy of Music Theory,” 8-9.

⁵⁶ Babbitt, “Past and Present Concepts of the Nature and Limits of Music,” 79.

⁵⁷ Many of the observations in this section echo those made by Marion Guck in her insightful study of Babbitt’s discourse on music, “Rehabilitating the Incurable,” *Theory, Analysis and Meaning in Music*, Anthony Pople, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 57-76. I will return to this essay and its companion article, “Rigors of Subjectivity,” in the next section.

More pertinent to this current discussion is how Babbitt's metatheory succeeds in facilitating a "meaningful" discourse on his music. Babbitt's basic analytical statements—regarding pitch-class set relationships, for example—maintain logical form, given that they are based upon the logical axioms of mathematical group theory. As for being empirically verifiable, it depends on what kind of observational evidence is offered in support of these statements. We have already seen that many of Babbitt's analytical statements do not correlate directly to listener perceptions, so how can these statements reflect an "empirical knowledge derived from experience"? Naturally, I cannot speak for how Babbitt hears and conceptualizes the musical structures he speaks of, but it is clear that the standard analyses of his music look primarily to the score for verification. The notes on the page, or their numerical analogs, are used to verify analytical statements—that is, to demonstrate that the statements are "meaningful."⁵⁸

Although "scientific" language and "scientific" method are not meant to restrict musical discourse, only to make the discourse "meaningful," Babbitt acknowledges certain limits of such a discourse. He concludes his analysis of *Relata I* by stating:

I am aware that my discussion has centered about, has been obliged to center about, "atomic" musical features: the atomic pitch class, and the atomic collection of pitch-class relationships: the twelve-tone set, if only because these are the most incorrigibly incontrovertible auditory correlates of the acoustical event, and because the progression

⁵⁸ However, according to Cook, this reliance on the musical score does not accurately depict performative reality. While basic intervallic relationships can be readily perceived in isolation, this does not necessarily equate to empirical knowledge of larger structures a listener's ability to hear intervals does not equate to hearing larger structures built from these intervals. "What we are doing is drawing a comparison between the psychoacoustical reality of musical perception within a given context and the judgments of pitch or interval that would be made were the music's constituent sounds to be heard individually; that is to say, we are modeling the experience of music in terms of the musicological categories embodied in ear training. ... [I]n the absence of any clearly demonstrable or generally accepted axioms of musical logic (or for that matter of any compelling reason to believe that such axioms might exist), it is perhaps best to regard the notion of musical 'logic' as itself a metaphorical construction, that is, one that is based on an analogy between formal reasoning and musical structure." Cook, *Music, Imagination, and Culture*, 235. This argument corroborates Sandow's observed disparity between how a piece works and how it sounds, and more importantly challenges how "meaningful" this discourse actually is. Of course, this claim could be leveled against any analysis, not just Babbitt's, which is why Cook speaks of analysis as "metaphor" or "myth." This does not necessarily make such statements "meaningless," but does challenge any claims of analytical absolutism.

from these minimal units through structural strata to the totality is founded on extensive interactions of differentiation and association, inter- and intradimensional, which demand musical experience and developed memorative capacity for their perception, and for their explication concepts that have not yet been generally or completely or accurately formulated, and for which we do not yet have therefore reliable abbreviational verbal characterizations. For those whose music strives, successfully or unsuccessfully, to make music as much as it can possibly be, rather than as little, the sense of verbal tentativeness and inadequacy is particularly saddening.⁵⁹

While his analyses focus primarily on connections between pitch-class sets or aggregate formation, Babbitt senses that there exist manifold relationships resulting from the twelve-tone system (including those on the musical surface) that are not readily discussed because we lack the means to perceive them adequately or to explain them meaningfully in their entirety. Thus the discourse remains tied to the “most incorrigibly incontrovertible auditory correlates of the acoustical event”—the basic pitch-class relationships and unfolding of the aggregate that are logically and empirically verifiable.⁶⁰

Returning to the previous “meaningless” examples, the suggestion that Mendelssohn’s works lack “real depth that opens wide perspectives” cannot be readily evaluated (verified) because the statement itself cannot be logically analyzed and thus is deemed by Babbitt to be “indefensible.” Likewise, the reference to an “unexpected C-flat” in the Mozart is “meaningless” on account of the statement’s ambiguity (how is it “unexpected”? who finds it “unexpected?”), not to mention Babbitt’s rebuttal that the C-flat appears earlier in the movement at the outset of measure two.⁶¹ Similarly, statements of “liking” or “disliking” a piece of music are typically disqualified due to the critic’s failure to adequately explain why. Babbitt observes that the typical critic will often “offer reasons for his ‘I didn’t like it’—in the form of assertions

⁵⁹ Babbitt, “On *Relata I*,” 254-255.

⁶⁰ This admission leads me to wonder what concepts Babbitt finds inexpressible in the positivist discourse he has defined. At the very least, his statement speaks to the “high-order zaniness” referenced by Sandow: the myriad possibilities inherent in Babbitt’s compositional system. See also Joseph Dubiel’s discussion of this passage in his paper presented at *Re-reading Babbitt: The Composer as Author*, Princeton University, 5 December 2003.

⁶¹ Babbitt, “The Structure and Function of Musical Theory,” 192.

that the work in question is ‘inexpressive,’ ‘undramatic,’ ‘lacking in poetry,’ etc., etc., tapping that store of vacuous equivalents hallowed by time for: ‘I don’t like it, and I cannot or will not state why.’”⁶²

It is worth exploring further this issue of criticism in Babbitt’s “meaningful” discourse about music. Babbitt’s objection to statements of simply “liking” or “disliking” a composition stem from his insistence on the aforementioned verification principle—a test failed by unsupported claims such as these. Part of the problem concerns the subjective nature of criticism; there will always be aspects of such statements that do not achieve any level of intersubjectivity. Thus Lewin argues that “if one is ever to progress beyond a basic (but solipsistic) ‘I like it’ or ‘it grabs me,’ it is very helpful to have recourse to the vocabulary of analysis and theory.”⁶³ Babbitt’s theoretical language allows scholars to speak about certain aspects of post-tonal music with precision, grounding critical statements within a logical (and verifiable) musical system. But for many listeners, these theoretical conceptions Babbitt highlights do not seem to explain directly the aural perceptions that prompted the initial comment of “liking” or “disliking.”

Personally speaking, many of the things I like about Babbitt’s music are not necessarily tied to his use of arrays and the unfolding of aggregates, *per se*; they have more to do with the effervescent, vivid musical surface—elements which I may or may not describe in Babbitt’s theoretical terms (i.e. those “atomic” features). While set structures and arrays give rise to this appealing musical surface, there are other compositional decisions that distinguish Babbitt’s musical language from that of his “dry as dust, unthinking clones.”⁶⁴ Babbitt says as much when

⁶² Babbitt, “The Composer as Specialist,” 40.

⁶³ Lewin, “Behind the Beyond,” 64-65.

⁶⁴ Rockwell, *All American Music*, 33. Sandow speaks of Babbitt’s distinct “mode of musical speech” that is both irregular and irresistible. See Sandow, “A Fine Madness,” 256-258.

he refers to his system and structures as “the bases for determining the depth, extent, and genuineness of the work’s originality.”⁶⁵ But he never moves beyond discussions of these basic “atomic” elements. My analytical project in this paper involves developing other ways of “meaningfully” describing features of Babbitt’s music without necessarily being bound to his theoretical conceptions alone.

Babbitt’s musical system and discourse may be logical and verifiable (via score study), they may show what he “likes” or “dislikes” in a work, and they may even explain that which he, as a listener, would like to know about a work. Yet this prioritization of verifiable “atomic” features over other musical elements (thus avoiding the risk of any haphazard forays into the highly subjective realms of perception and interpretation) has grave consequences. If we look at the criticism implicit in their analyses, it seems that Babbitt’s and other scholars’ accounts of underlying structures (abstractions of “atomic” features) do not simply support critical statements about a composition; the musical system becomes the sole focus of aesthetic evaluation instead of the actual (performed) work. This is not to say that formal structures cannot factor into critical judgment of a work (tonal or non-tonal alike), but given Babbitt’s insistence that we lack the verbal and memorative capabilities to discuss meaningfully other musical elements, the discourse seems to indicate that the abstract musical system stands in place of the work as the object of attention. If this is the case, then critical statements of the work’s value can only be judged by means of formal analysis (of logically-constructed musical systems), which effectively distances much of the listening experience from the work.⁶⁶ Moreover, this retreat behind theory and analysis protects Babbitt’s compositions from unsubstantiated critiques

⁶⁵ See note 30.

⁶⁶ “A formal analysis is a kind of mechanism whose input is the score, and whose output is a determination of coherence or an aesthetic judgment. In other words, it purports to establish or explain what is significant in music while circumventing the human experience through which such significance is constituted; to borrow a phrase from Coulter, it aims at ‘deleting the subject.’” Cook, *Music, Imagination, and Culture*, 241.

of the unfamiliar musical surface, but, unfortunately, also silences alternative means of appreciating his works.

III. Words about Music

Babbitt's positivist approach establishes the analyst in a position of prestige and control as the excavator of structural data underlying a work's musical surface. The work, then, is treated as an artifact or object to be analyzed, and discussions of its immediate existence as performed reality are denigrated as journalism, not academic scholarship.⁶⁷ Furthermore, it succeeds in removing the listener from the analysis; music is presented from a distance as an amalgam of abstract structures and systems, not contingent on direct aural experience. While the analytical insights are profound, these articles all adopt a similar methodological framework; the issue critics take with this discourse largely concerns its apparent critical monism—its espousal of a single interpretation within the compositional system alone. As will be subsequently shown, the lack of attention given to the experiential aspects of Babbitt's music situates this discourse within the broader politics of academic prestige and various manifestations of the venerable mind/body split.

Music as Music

Susan McClary challenges that the rhetoric of Babbitt and his followers reinforces a system of prestige that glorifies their so-called “difficult” music. Analytical articles about this

⁶⁷ Music as performance has long been relegated to the periphery of music criticism. Carolyn Abbate notes that even after the 1980s disciplinary revolution in musicology, “performances ... were to remain in large part as marginal to criticism or hermeneutics as they had been to formalism, biography, history, or theory.” Carolyn Abbate, “Music—Drastic or Gnostic?” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Spring 2004), 506. Babbitt expressed regret about the modern musical culture, “that the people who had demonstrated that they were concerned to look at a piece of music and say intelligible things about it, from which (if one wished to) one could at least devolve reasonable and defensible evaluatives, were never consulted. Instead you would still have the ubiquitous journalism and still have the irresponsibles (often performers) determining what could be performed.” Babbitt, *Words about Music*, 123.

music are filled with theoretical terms, and could be perceived as a sort of “shoptalk” among composer-theorists, and a formidable barrier to those outside their academic milieu.⁶⁸ She connects this specialized discourse to the “Who Cares If You Listen?” mentality she associates with Babbitt and other promoters of the avant-garde culture of “difficult” music:

As the end [of Modernism] has become increasingly evident, supporters have occasionally called upon the avant-garde to recast its rhetoric of difficulty-for-the-sake-of-difficulty... [Babbitt] continues to exalt difficulty, to denigrate the alternatives as “public circuses of music, the citadels of show biz,” ... and to define ... the kind of understanding he expects the listener to have of his music.⁶⁹

Additionally, McClary points out the “survival” trope in the writings of Babbitt and fellow serial composers: the “Who Cares?” attitude largely stems from Babbitt’s fear of the extinction of “serious” composition—that music, unless rescued by the university, would “cease to evolve, and, in that important sense, ... cease to live.”⁷⁰ Babbitt argued that contemporary music’s only chance for survival was to be entirely removed from the public realm of popular culture and preserved in the sanctuary of higher education. This plea ultimately resulted in the establishment of composition and theory within the university, and the institution of a “scientific” discourse about music that seemed fitting for its new environment.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Composer Arthur Berger charged that the vocabulary promoted by Babbitt and company was “spawned by a desire at first to keep the discoveries private, and little attempt was made to define the proliferation of new terms for the outsider.” Arthur Berger, *Reflections of an American Composer* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 85.

⁶⁹ McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 64-65. McClary continues by quoting Babbitt, who expects his listeners to have “not that kind of understanding which reduces the rich manifestations, the rich ramifications, of musical relationships to some mundane banalities, not some sort of many-one mapping of all those wonderfully rich ramifications of musical relationships to some sort of representation of the world out there ... but understanding of music and understanding of a great many other things by a fairly obvious process.” Babbitt, *Words about Music*, 182. This quote reveals further Babbitt’s reverence for the multiplicity of possible musical relationships inherent in the twelve-tone system, a trope seen repeatedly in his articles.

⁷⁰ Babbitt, “The Composer as Specialist,” 54.

⁷¹ “Back in the early fifties when we saw that we were in trouble, when we saw we didn’t have the appropriate audience (and we do concern ourselves about such things, if only for selfish reasons), we thought that perhaps we could appeal to our fellow intellectuals by impressing them with the seriousness of our words. We thought we would attract them with our words about music and this would eventually lead them to the sound of our music. Well of course our words went as unheeded as our music went unheard. But we learned a lesson. We discovered that what induces even more resentment than taking music seriously is taking talking about music seriously. This is not a trivial concern. You know, in the beginning is the work, and these days in the beginning with the work is the word

Thus the subject “you” addressed in the question “Who cares if you listen?” was very clearly the musical layperson—Babbitt’s “whistling man in the street”⁷²—someone likely to reject Babbitt’s music on account of its “difficult” musical surface.⁷³ Babbitt’s rigorous discourse allowed him to dismiss promptly unsubstantiated claims such as these as “meaningless.” Of course Babbitt cared if people listened, but in order to criticize his music, one had to be able to give “meaningful” reasons—assumingly in terms of post-tonal theory. This way Babbitt’s discourse was able to preserve and protect his music; after all, the survival of “serious” music was at stake.⁷⁴ However, the discourse Babbitt and other scholars used to describe this endangered music treats the compositions as if they were objects, artifacts, and ultimately dead. This paper, then, seeks in part to resuscitate Babbitt’s music by offering an analysis that reflects his compositions’ status as “alive and signifying,” a phrase I will return to shortly.

McClary’s dismissal of “the orthodox, self-contained analyses” found in *Perspectives of New Music* as requiring “little more than a specialist’s grasp of combinatorial techniques” does not give credit to the depth of musical insight present in these articles, nor does it take into account the important role this rhetoric had in creating a communal (intersubjective) language for discussing developments in modern composition. I propose, however, that not just the technical nomenclature, but also the analytical approach creates this system of prestige. It seems

about the work. Music is talked about before it is listened to, while it’s listened to, and instead of being listened to. ... The notion of serious discourse about music is a concern to me not because I have to be concerned essentially about the state and fate of discourse, but because I’m concerned about the state and fate of music.” Babbitt, *Words about Music*, 174-175.

⁷² Babbitt, “The Composer as Specialist,” 54.

⁷³ “I am aware that ‘tradition’ has it that the lay listener, by virtue of some undefined, transcendent faculty, always is able to arrive at a musical judgment absolute in its wisdom if not always permanent in its validity. ... [I]n the realm of public music, the concertgoer is secure in the knowledge that the amenities of concertgoing protect his firmly stated ‘I didn’t like it’ from further scrutiny.” Babbitt, “The Composer as Specialist,” 50-51.

⁷⁴ See McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 62-64.

that the presence of such terminology is not as significant an issue as is the dismissal of other modes of speech—that is, other ways of approaching and conceptualizing Babbitt’s music.

McClary is correct in her assessment that “to deal with the human (i.e. expressive, social, political, etc.) dimension of this music need not qualify as retreating into anti-intellectualism,” and that in contrast to the standard discourse, “explication of this music as historical human artifact would involve not only knowledge of serial principles, but also grounding in critical theory and extensive knowledge of twentieth-century political and cultural history.”⁷⁵ This argument introduces a trope common in the criticism of Babbitt’s music and discourse: audiences and scholars alike repeatedly call for acknowledgment of the “human” element missing in discussions of his music. Sandow contends that the technical nature of Babbitt’s writing

leads people to call his music “mathematical.” [Babbitt] answers that this is a misunderstanding of mathematics, which can only describe things and never be the thing itself, and that mathematical models could be made to describe Bach’s or Beethoven’s way of composing as well as his own. But that’s not the point. People who call his music “mathematical” are using the word metaphorically, to say that human feeling is missing. Instead of rebuking them, Babbitt should speak to the question he surely knows they’re asking, and tell them what the human value of his work might be.⁷⁶

McClary lauds Sandow’s article for discussing Babbitt’s “music *as music*: as works of art that resonate with the human condition in the mid-twentieth century, that could ... even come to

⁷⁵ McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 65. This sentiment is echoed by Martin Brody who writes, “Where, for example, are the points of contact with musicologists, so many of whom are *au courant* in contemporary cultural theory but seem indifferent to and illiterate in most contemporary music (excepting, of course, Madonna)? Where are the ongoing discussions of artistic values and experiences with professional writers about music? What will be the common vocabulary of these conversations? These questions may seem modest, but the issues of what vocabulary we share, and with whom, are crucial.” Martin Brody, “Our Music,” *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 551. This thesis only brushes the surface of issues relating to post-war Modernist aesthetics and contemporary American musical culture.

⁷⁶ Sandow, “A Fine Madness,” 254. Or, in the words of another music scholar to me, “Where’s the humor in that music?” Apparently discussing Babbitt’s musical humor (and there’s plenty of it) would help explain the human element as well.

influence the listener's perception of the world and the self."⁷⁷ Phrased that way, "music as music" implies a distinction from the aforementioned representation of music as *musical system* or music as *theoretical conceptions*. For most, discussions of hexachordal combinatoriality or aggregate formation clearly fail to "resonate with the human experience" or express "human feeling." This sentiment could be traced in part to misconceptions about pre-compositional planning, that the system somehow negates the composer's creative and expressive input. But more likely, for those who find Babbitt's music "expressive" or "dramatic,"⁷⁸ there is simply a conceptual divide between the analytical abstractions (hexachord, aggregate) and those musical gestures and features that evoke such responses.

Mead refers to this discourse as an analytical "shorthand" between composers and theorists: "Our tendency to use technical terms as though they referred to *things* can be very handy, but it can mask their origins as terms to describe our *experiences*."⁷⁹ This may be the case, but surely most listeners would not be placated simply by the addition of some visceral adjectives; speaking of experiencing some "expressive" hexachords or "dramatic" aggregates would not address the issue. I do not intend to mock the standard discourse on Babbitt's music for failing to address those aspects ("human feelings") that are beyond its intended scope. These structures may represent experiences of some very "expressive" or "dramatic" music, but for most listeners something is lost in translation.

⁷⁷ McClary, "Terminal Prestige," 64. (Emphasis original.)

⁷⁸ To manipulate Babbitt's statements on criticism; see note 62.

⁷⁹ Mead, "One Man's Signal," 261. He explains: "It is not unusual to hear something like the following: 'The Schoenberg Piano Concerto opens with a statement of the row in the right hand.' This sort of statement can wipe out all sorts of aspects of our experience of this passage. Turning it around to, 'I hear a statement of the row played by the right hand at the beginning of the Schoenberg Piano Concerto,' at least focuses our attention to the listener's experience, but it still obliterates much of that experience, by reifying what might be better understood as an abstract conceptual framework. The particularities of the experience of rhythm, register, dynamics, and articulation are subsumed by 'the row.'"

So how do we initiate a discourse that addresses the music's "human values"? It seems that speaking of Babbitt's music *as music* involves examining broader expressions of music *as experience*, that is, of music that is composed, performed, and listened to. It involves revealing a personal relationship between the music and the composer/performer/listener/analyst, a relationship that could indeed "influence the listener's perception of the world and the self."

One possible approach to describing music *as music* would be to start with aural perceptions, however they are experienced, and then situate these observations within a system—"invent structures" that reflect the musical experience. However, introducing a more interpretive, listening-based approach to musical analysis involves addressing yet other systems of prestige inherent in academic musical discourse.

Discursive Politics

In "Masculine Discourse in Music Theory," Fred Everett Maus links discursive styles to notions of gender difference, arguing that "the contemporary field of music theory is internally structured, and hierarchized, by a distinction between masculine and feminine discourse."⁸⁰ He proposes that a more personal, experiential writing style is often interpreted as marginal in comparison to the distanced, non-experiential mode of expression commonly associated with the brand of music theory centering on Schenkerian and post-tonal analyses.⁸¹ In particular, orienting the discourse towards the act of listening places the analyst in a receptive position, and consequently this passivity is often compensated for by substituting an unevocative, objective language.⁸²

⁸⁰ Maus, "Masculine Discourse in Music Theory," *Perspectives of New Music* 31, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 267.

⁸¹ Maus, "Masculine Discourse in Music Theory," 266-267.

⁸² Maus, "Masculine Discourse in Music Theory," 272-273.

Marion Guck echoes these sentiments by observing that music scholarship too often treats compositions “as if they were artifacts, entities having material form, which we can study and discuss separate from ourselves.”⁸³ But in reality, this constructed distance between analyst and work is an illusion: “sounds do not become music until they have entered a person, until they have been heard or imagined and attended to. Music exists only in the interaction between sound and the body-and-mind of an individual.”⁸⁴

It is exactly this interaction between analyst and work that I am interested in exploring. Guck maintains elsewhere that music analysts have never achieved complete “objectivity,” in that “language conveying a personal involvement with musical works pervades, indeed shapes, even the most technically oriented musical prose.”⁸⁵ Even the distanced, objective approach to analysis that attempts to deny agency to the music through passive constructions, reveals the analyst’s own subjectivities. That is, each musical depiction is shaped by the analyst’s personal engagement with the work; objectivity is impossible when experiential evidence must be given.⁸⁶

Still, how can we meaningfully express this personal interaction between analyst and work that underlies every analysis? In approaching Babbitt’s music, I do not intend to ignore its formal aspects, nor do I wish to venture into an “incorrigible” discourse of empty metaphors and descriptions. Rather, I look to investigate the ways in which the theoretical conceptions give rise to a vivid musical surface, and how, in turn, perceptions of musical gestures can be meaningfully discussed. Despite certain methodological and professional challenges in achieving a meaningful discourse focusing on such elements, this approach—reestablishing a listening-based

⁸³ Marion Guck, “Music Loving, Or the Relationship with the Piece,” *Music Theory Online* 2, no. 2 (March 1996), §13.

⁸⁴ Guck, “Music Loving,” §14.

⁸⁵ Marion Guck, “Analytical Fictions,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 16, no. 2 (Autumn 1994): 218.

⁸⁶ And this reveals a contradiction in Babbitt’s “scientific” discourse on music that claims objectivity while depending on experiential evidence.

connection between work and analyst—may provide a glimpse of the elusive “human values” in Babbitt’s music.

IV. Analytical Alternatives

This chapter thus far has discussed the standard analytical approach to Babbitt’s music. Claims against this discourse have highlighted his exclusive language, implied aesthetic values, and limited scope. Consequently, this criticism suggests a series of binary oppositions and associated hierarchies: objectivity versus subjectivity, musical system versus surface, how a composition works versus how it sounds, masculine discourse versus feminine, and so on. I feel compelled to mention these dichotomies because, despite recent moves toward a critical and culturally-informed approach to music scholarship, the divisions persist, particularly within the academic field of music theory. Additionally, for many scholars interested in alternative approaches to music such as hermeneutics or narrative theory, Babbitt remains a symbol of all that is wrong, “positivistic,” or “formalistic” about analysis.⁸⁷ I find this to be a harsh denunciation of an analytical system that has done much to enrich hearings of post-tonal works and provide a language for meaningfully discussing such music.⁸⁸ Thus I do not want to present these divisions as absolute; it is not useful to view these categories (system/surface, work/sound, objectivity/subjectivity) as mutually exclusive. Nor is it essential that Babbitt’s music be

⁸⁷ Why else would Kerman devote an entire chapter of *Contemplating Music* primarily to a discussion of Babbitt and his theory colleagues?

⁸⁸ I commiserate with Guck who writes: “Lately I’ve been struck by the realization that we music scholars frequently have an inclination to legislate *against* work different from our own. From my perspective as a theorist, I see that some theorists would like the writing of personal accounts of musical experience to go away. On another side, musicologists interested in hermeneutics will often take time at some point in their papers to complain that theory and analysis detach musical works from their contexts, or to call theory and analysis formalist or positivist. (I feel kinship with hermeneuticists so I find this painful.)” Guck, “Music Loving,” §2.

discussed only in ways that he ascribes.⁸⁹ As some scholars have already demonstrated, Babbitt's statements on discourse do not preclude other "meaningful" approaches to his music.⁹⁰

"Rigors of Subjectivity"

Guck's 1997 article "Rigors of Subjectivity" appeared as part of *Perspectives of New Music's* celebration of Babbitt's eightieth birthday.⁹¹ Guck's article, however, talks more about the music of Brahms than the music of Babbitt. She presents her analysis of Brahms' Intermezzo in E-flat Major, op. 117, no. 1, as a demonstration of Babbitt's lasting influence on music scholarship. In doing so, she reconciles the rigors of Babbitt's "scientific" language and "scientific" method with a more subjective approach to music analysis.

Based on Babbitt's critique of musical discourse, Guck lists two goals and two methods of analysis. Simply put, "the first goal is to codify and enhance hearing; the second is to address the contextualities of the musical work in order to provide an account of its individual identity. The first methodological principle is to use language with precision; the second is to give one's reasons for what one asserts."⁹² In terms of the methodological principles, we have already seen how providing substantiation for musical observations enables scholars to communicate clearly ("meaningfully"), thus aiding readers in understanding and evaluating such claims (and

⁸⁹ Responding to McClary's article, Mead comments: "I certainly don't want Babbitt's writings to limit how I hear his music, and I simply refuse to be discouraged by them!" Mead, "One Man's Signal," 273 n. 6.

⁹⁰ It could be asked why I feel the need to maintain allegiance to Babbitt's edicts on "meaningful" discourse. I find nothing wrong with holding scholars accountable for the statements they make about music; in order to achieve a common (intersubjective) understanding of the issues I wish to discuss, Babbitt's "meaningful" discourse is essential. My argument here is that I can talk meaningfully about Babbitt's music without sounding like he does. Guck demonstrates this admirably, as will be discussed next.

⁹¹ Marion A. Guck, "Rigors of Subjectivity," *Perspectives of New Music* 35, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 53-64. This edition of *Perspectives of New Music* contains numerous tribute articles to Babbitt, as do volumes 25, nos. 1/2, and 14, no. 2/15, no. 1.

⁹² Guck, "Rigors of Subjectivity," 55.

achieving intersubjectivity). However, the goals of analysis cited above and the way in which Guck realizes these goals merit further comment.

Guck's analysis expands aural perceptions and highlights unique features of the Brahms Intermezzo by examining impressions and psychological states evoked by musical events. This task may seem contrary to Babbitt's metatheoretical project, but Guck's analysis illustrates "the explicit connection of interpretive attributions with observational language."⁹³ Following the precepts for "meaningful" discourse, she demonstrates how one can use a precise "scientific" language to "give reasons" for figurative observations without sounding overly "scientific." While her language at times is metaphoric and personal, it is not carelessly subjective. Guck's approach enriches the hearing of this particular piano piece by highlighting the individual voices of composer and analyst, and substantiates her claims with supporting evidence.

It should be mentioned, however, that although Guck's analysis features a thorough application of Babbitt's analytic method, its success as "meaningful" discourse hinges on the reader's shared understanding of certain theoretical constructs; the evidence supporting her qualitative claims remains solidly in the communal language of tonal theory. The opening phrase of Brahms' Intermezzo is understood as being "soothing" in part because of its stable tonic and dominant harmonies and limited chromaticism. Likewise, the middle section is heard as "restless and disquieting" because it continuously "wavers between tonalities."⁹⁴ Learned

⁹³ Guck, "Rigors of Subjectivity," 55. By utilizing Babbitt's "scientific" method (i.e. verification via observational evidence), "incurable" musical descriptions such as Hans David's "unexpected C-flat," mentioned above, can be validated: "Babbitt would say that David's statement must be linked explicitly with statements that use only observation language and/or theoretical language that is closer to the observable features of the music. This is especially important for personal terms since their relation to other theoretical terms and to observation statements is not stipulated. Ultimately the covertly theoretical language must be linked to specifically musical descriptions of individual events and relations between those events so that David's (thought) experiment can be duplicated. This is the means for rehabilitating 'incurable statements.'" Guck, "Rehabilitating the Incurable," 62.

⁹⁴ Guck, "Rigors of Subjectivity," 58.

significance of these basic theoretical concepts definitively shapes listener impressions throughout the piece and gives credence to Guck's argument.

It is certainly not surprising that analysis of a work by Brahms would invoke terms and concepts relating to tonality; the question here is whether Guck's metaphoric approach could be convincingly supported when applied to post-tonal works. Many scholars concur that discussing meaning in contemporary works is futile precisely because of "contextuality." Eero Tarasti states: "From a semiotic perspective, the greatest dilemma of Modernism seems to be that the listener cannot receive both its code and its message at the same time. Without any familiar point of reference in the music, any level of 'first articulation,' its reception becomes awkward."⁹⁵ The contemporary musical discourse, then, seems inevitably relegated to the development of new theories that detail the primitive structures—the syntactical nature—of modern musical languages. I am inclined to challenge this notion; we have already seen cases of noise becoming a signal through listening. The process of interpreting, conceptualizing, or "making sense" out of perceived sounds suggests not only the invention of structures, but also assigning meaning to how these structures function. The question is how we can meaningfully discuss this process.

"...What Surfaces"

Guck states that, because of the profound contextuality of contemporary music, "a work gains its identity through the 'meanings' created from its particular web of internal relations."⁹⁶ This suggests that extended study of an individual composition can give rise to fruitful analyses of the structures, functions, and even meanings of gestures within the work. Even if

⁹⁵ Eero Tarasti, *Signs of Music* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002), 43.

⁹⁶ Guck, "Rigors of Subjectivity," 54.

contemporary music, as a whole, lacks the communality of a shared musical language, it is possible to perceive deep connections within the context of an individual work. Proof of this assertion can be found in Steven Mackey's 1987 article, "...What Surfaces," in which he provides analysis of Babbitt's *Arie da Capo* for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano. Mackey seeks to explain his critical description of Babbitt's works as "intricate and delicately balanced counterpoint"⁹⁷ by detailing the interplay of surface aural phenomena and underlying relationships that emerge as the music unfolds.

Mackey's language is a blend of fundamental theory ("interval class," "[024] trichord") and colorful adjectives, practically antithetical in style to the oft criticized, obtuse, "scientific" articles. Introductory comments reveal his awareness of the standard contemporary musical discourse, and that his approach differs in certain respects from other investigations of Babbitt's music. He tacks on a pseudo-disclaimer regarding his approach: "Finally, [this analysis includes] some acknowledgement of the visceral qualities of this music. I have even offered an occasional adjectival interpretation of musical character."⁹⁸ Take, for example:

The B-flat5 (violin) in measure 7 is not merely a member of a (0,2,4) trichord. It has a history that brings it immediately to the foreground. The bold return of this pitch yanks one back to measure 6 and in so doing gives a sense of urgency to the clarinet's crescendo and registral traverse (second half of measure 7). By that I mean that measure 6 seemed to have firmly put the issue to rest, but the return of the B-flat in measure 7 (after the fact) is consequently destabilizing. The clarinet takes control and pushes forward to a new goal (the E/D at the end of the bar) as if to prove that, although it was responsible for introducing the B-flat5 in the first place, it has no part in the violin's belligerent recall. The musical discourse is interrupted briefly with the flashback to B-flat but recovers to continue with greater resolve . . .⁹⁹

Mackey's analysis illuminates the vitality and depth of Babbitt's music, while consistently providing measure-by-measure evidence to support his observations. With a writing

⁹⁷ Mackey, "...What Surfaces," *Perspectives of New Music* 25, nos. 1 and 2 (Winter-Summer 1987): 258.

⁹⁸ Mackey, "...What Surfaces," 259.

⁹⁹ Mackey, "...What Surfaces," 268-269.

style that resonates at times of Tovey or McClary (“the contrabass register beats wildly as G1 rubs against A-flat1...”¹⁰⁰), Mackey maps out the structures, functions, and meanings of musical gestures within the work. However, it is not the charismatic language that distinguishes this article; it is his acknowledgement and discussion of the work’s signifying musical language—of the (as Guck would say) “‘meanings’ created from its particular web of internal relations.”

Just as in Guck’s analysis of the Brahms Intermezzo, Mackey’s descriptions of *Arie da Capo* assign emotive states to musical elements, and, most significantly, grant agency to the music itself. For example, a single pitch, B-flat5, “yanks” the listener back to memories of a previous measure and “gives a sense of urgency” to a coming gesture. As defined within the context of Babbitt’s musical language, the “sense of urgency” and “destabilizing” effect engendered by the B-flat are as verifiable as Guck’s comments about the “restless and disquieting” section of the Intermezzo as situated within a tonal syntax. A sense of motion and progression in Mackey’s account of the piece is particularly noteworthy; structures do not simply “unfold” or “manifest themselves,” they “yank,” “push forward,” “flashback,” then “continue with greater resolve.” Moreover, Mackey’s invocation of a “musical discourse” that is “interrupted” but later “recovers” suggests that the work possesses communicative abilities.

While still working with the same basic “atomic” musical features (pitch and interval classes) as found in a standard Babbitt analysis, Mackey is able to create novel pitch associations and structural groupings that acknowledge his immediate musical experience.¹⁰¹ Moreover, by introducing analyst/listener interpretations to the analytical discourse, Mackey demonstrates the

¹⁰⁰ Mackey, “...What Surfaces,” 263.

¹⁰¹ However, Mackey’s analysis is only a partial exploration of other ways in which these “atomic” features interact. As Babbitt suggests, we still lack the memorative capacity and language for processing the “progression from these minimal units through structural strata.” My point here is that the basic “atomic” features of the work take on agency and character that are not addressed in Babbitt’s analyses.

possibility of establishing a “meaningful” discourse on the musical surface that treats the work as a living entity with, we might say, distinguishable “human values.”

This notion of musical subjects with “human values,” called for by McClary and Sandow and indicative of personal relationships with musical works, is central to the analytical approach I will explore in this paper. I take my cue from Naomi Cumming, who states:

Any attributions to music of qualities that would normally be applied to human beings, such as vocality, gesture or volition, indicate that subjective content has been heard. The sense of a “subject” emerges from these things, but is not reducible to them. ... Vocality, gesture and agency together, understood in their own right as signs, now become the representata for a new synthesis that forms the “subject” in the music. This subject can be found in answer to some rhetorical questions that appear when subjective qualities are attributed to music: “whose voice?”, “whose gesture?”, “whose will?” The rhetoric does not ask for an answer, but points to a subject who seems to emerge with specific sensuous, emotional and willful qualities, and yet not to have a name.¹⁰²

Mackey’s analysis expresses aspects of the work’s agency, suggesting possible connections to “human values.” The presence of such a subject suggests personal identification with the musical work, and acknowledges the work’s metaphysical “life” and its potential for communication with the listener/analyst. This is what I mean when I call Babbitt’s works “alive and signifying.”

In the case of Babbitt’s “On *Relata I*,” the only agency is given to the instruments and formal sections, which “introduce” or “present” structural elements (hexachords, aggregates).¹⁰³

With this, either agency implicitly belongs to the composer who originally put these structures

¹⁰² Naomi Cumming, “The Subjectivities of ‘Embarme Dich,’” *Music Analysis* 16, no. 1 (March 1997): 11-12.

¹⁰³ Alternatively, the passive construction states that these structural elements “are presented by” the instruments or timbral families.

together, or the structural elements are attributed to the compositional system itself.¹⁰⁴ What I am arguing here is that, when encountering a musical work, the listener is able to “invent structures” and interpret meanings of musical gestures, regardless of how these structures align with the compositional system or whether the perceived meanings were intended by the composer. Building on Guck’s and Mackey’s articles, the following chapter will explore further perception and interpretation of musical subjectivity—of vocality, gestures, and agency—in Babbitt’s song cycle, *Du*.

¹⁰⁴ In his introduction to “On *Relata I*,” Babbitt claims to be avowedly anti-intentionalist and prefers to simply enumerate the different structural relationships functioning within the compositional system. Yet the typical analytical approach to serial music inevitably involves a reconstruction of the composer’s specific creative process, often starting with identification of “the row.” To be sure, analysts focus on more sophisticated musical relationships than simply labeling row forms, but the implication of composer intent remains. Ashby writes that “because they are so often covertly anti-intentionalist but phrased in intentionalist terms, theoretical discussions of twentieth-century music tend to have a particularly strange, even bigamous relationship with intentionalism and anti-intentionalism. ... Institutionalized discussions of twentieth-century music were founded on the dual platform of twelve-tone theory and Forte pitch-class set analysis—two scientific methods of investigation that for the most part advance supra-intentionalist arguments, many very useful ones among them, in a vocabulary of compositional-theoretical intentionalism.” Ashby, “Intention and Meaning in Modernist Music,” 26-27. The issue of composer intent extends far beyond the scope of this paper, and has also been taken up in Eithan Haimo, “Atonality, Analysis, and the Intentional Fallacy,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 18, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 167-199.

CHAPTER TWO

Views of *Du*

In Chapter One, I offered a preliminary critique of Milton Babbitt's discourse on music and the music-theoretical literature he inspired, and, following the work of Marion Guck, Steven Mackey, and Naomi Cumming, I explored possible methods for reconciling Babbitt's proposed "scientific" language and method with a more subjective approach to music analysis. In this chapter I will present a case study investigating the ramifications of such analysis. The object of inquiry is Babbitt's 1951 song cycle, *Du*—in particular how the music conveys the meaning of the text, and, in turn, how listeners could possibly perceive the meaning of musical gestures. By "bringing to life" the complex relationship of the text's poetic personas, *Ich* and *Du*, as they interact within Babbitt's musical world, this analysis shows one way in which Babbitt's music engages the analyst/listener. I will make some references to the compositional structure, but in this chapter my focus remains on perceptions of the vibrant musical surface conceptualized within the context of the poetic text.¹⁰⁵

The song cycle *Du* comprises seven songs for soprano and piano, with a text consisting of selections of German Expressionist poetry by August Stramm (1874-1915). Stramm's text features little action and no dialogue; instead it expresses the thoughts and perceptions of a narrator, *Ich*, who gazes at another character identified only as *Du*. According to Christopher Waller,

¹⁰⁵ Plenty has been written on the compositional structures of *Du*. See Andrew Mead, *An Introduction to the Music of Milton Babbitt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 107-112; John Rahn, "How Do You *Du* (by Milton Babbitt)?," *Perspectives of New Music* 14, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1976): 61-80; Milton Babbitt, "Responses: A First Approximation," *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*, 351-354; Robert D. Morris and Brian Alegant, "The Even Partitions in Twelve-Tone Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 10 (Spring 1988): 74-101.

The “Du” has been variously interpreted as Stramm’s wife, as God, as the cosmos, as somebody/anybody of the opposite sex, as the opposite sex, as somebody/anybody outside the poet’s self. Bozetti ... argues that the longing for a “Du” represents a longing for the unity of all being... Perhaps it is more helpful to interpret the “Du” as Woman who exerts an irresistible sexual attraction on the poet and whom he regards as the only potential mediatrix between Man and the mysteries of the cosmos.¹⁰⁶

Central to my understanding of this text is the interpretation of *Du* as object of the speaker’s, *Ich*’s, male gaze. The gendered reading of Stramm’s poetry suggested in the above quote, interprets *Ich* as masculine and *Du* as feminine due to textual references (*Rock, Kleid, Brust* all pointing to *Du*) and a common assumption that the poet’s (Stramm’s) voice is presented in the first person, *Ich*. However, when applied to Babbitt’s setting of the text, this reading is complicated by the fact that *Ich*’s perspective is sung by a female soprano. This is certainly not unheard of—for example, female vocalists often perform Schumann’s *Dichterliebe*¹⁰⁷—and furthermore, the poetic personas take on new identities when transferred into Babbitt’s musical world. I will, however, avoid use of gendered pronouns in this analysis, referring only to *Ich* and *Du*. The “male gaze” present in much of the poetic text can then be understood as an intentionally objectifying and possessive gaze.

Because Babbitt claims to feel “much more at home poetically in German” and is attracted to texts with “novel sonic structure[s],”¹⁰⁸ his choice of text seems largely motivated by Stramm’s treatment of poetic rhythm and phrasing. The poems Babbitt selected from Stramm’s collection feature a fragmented syntax and short lines, some consisting of only one or two syllables. Additionally, neologisms, playful manipulation of words, and recurring vowel sounds

¹⁰⁶ Christopher Waller, *Expressionist Poets and Critics* (London: University of London Institute of Germanic Studies, 1986), 31.

¹⁰⁷ Edward T. Cone, *The Composer’s Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 23. See also Melinda Boyd, “Gendered Voices: The ‘Liebesfrühling’ Lieder of Robert and Clara Schumann,” *19th-Century Music* 23, no. 2 (Autumn 1999): 145-162.

¹⁰⁸ Milton Babbitt, “Milton Babbitt,” *Soundpieces: Interviews with American Composers*, Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, eds. (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1982), 50.

provide endless possibilities for musical realization. However, Babbitt's choice of text was not greeted with unabashed acclaim. A critic at the 1953 performance of *Du* at the International Society for Contemporary Music festival reported:

It was a daring challenge to set, in 1951, words by August Stramm, extremest of German expressionist poets in 1912; how could he match an outmoded literary style with any musical language current today? If Mr. Babbitt failed, it is perhaps because he did not follow Schönberg, who once explained to the writer that a composer chose words to set which enabled his music to express itself, not the other way round.¹⁰⁹

The first half of this quote questions post-war aesthetics, particularly the aspects of 1910s music and literature that were appealing to Babbitt and other composers of his generation. Through his choice of German Expressionist poetry, Babbitt associates himself (consciously, I assume) with the Second Viennese School, and his compositional system, likewise, clearly connects him with pre-war Serialism. Yet Babbitt's musical language is markedly different from those of Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg, so it is understandable that the author of this review, conscious of the Viennese tradition, found Babbitt's choice of text somewhat anachronistic. Perhaps some facet of the post-WWII American Modernist music scene (only beginning to emerge when this article was published) did not seem to blend well with the cultural weight and ethos accompanying Stramm's WWI-era poetry. The shift in musical values that occurred in the years immediately following 1945 warrant a separate study altogether, and my analysis of Babbitt's musical language should not be considered a definitive investigation of 1950-60s Modernist aesthetic values.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Edward Clark, "The I. S. C. M. Festival, *The Musical Times* 94, no. 1326 (August 1953): 377.

¹¹⁰ Anne Shreffler calls for a reevaluation of the 1945 paradigm shift that led to a return to Modernism in the United States and Europe. See Anne Shreffler, "Three Myth of Empirical Historiography: A Response to Joseph N. Straus," *The Musical Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 30-38. Additionally, I find it interesting that the above quote was likely motivated by surface aspects of "musical language current today" and did not mention Babbitt's serial methods. Granted, performance reviews typically address the musical surface, but other reviews of Babbitt's vocal music from the similar time period at least mention Babbitt's use of serial techniques:

"Milton Babbitt's song cycle *Du*, of 1951, is a strictly dodecaphonic work. Its tone-rows (one for each song) are constructed in a way that their second half is the mirror of the first. The vocal part consists of many brief phrases,

I will instead focus on perception and interpretation of Babbitt's music, and the second half of the above quote raises additional questions pertinent to this approach, namely the relationship of text and music in *Du*. It is my contention that Stramm's text does indeed allow Babbitt's music to "express itself." In fact, I find the poetic text to be the ideal means for approaching musical agency and subjectivity in Babbitt's music; exploring the world of the poetic personas *Ich* and *Du* confers possible meaning to musical gestures and presents an identifiable "human value" in the music.

But first, my methodology requires further elaboration. In terms of discussing how Stramm's poetic personas translate into Babbitt's song cycle, I look to the framework established in Edward T. Cone's *The Composer's Voice*, as well as to applications of his premises by scholars such as Carolyn Abbate and Lawrence Kramer.¹¹¹ In particular, my analysis promotes *Ich* and *Du* as agents in their own drama, recounted through Stramm's text as sung by the vocal persona *Ich*. If the vocalist plays the part of the protagonist, *Ich*, it would be easy to assign the role of *Du* to the piano. Yet the text suggests that *Ich* and *Du* never converse; the scenarios unfold solely within *Ich*'s mind. As will be explained in the subsequent analysis, my reading of

practically tonal by themselves, which are almost unrelated to each other. Supporting the declamation, they parallel an expressionistically disjointed sentence structure. This kind of pointillism, if it may be called that, appears also in the piano accompaniment. Here we find numerous rests and tones that constantly and unpredictably change their duration and register. Harmony is chiefly defined in terms of density (close together, far apart, etc.). The work has style; it is a noteworthy contribution to a genre that is not sufficiently cultivated by the more talented among contemporary composers in America." Hans Nathan, "[Review]," *Notes*, 2nd Ser. 17, no. 2 (March 1960): 322.

"More abstract in style is [*The Widow's Lament in Springtime*] by Babbitt, a composer well-known for his application of dodecaphonic principles. In this song Babbitt has written some fine linear counterpoint. The voice and the piano parts contribute four melodic strands, each being a separate, jagged contrapuntal line to which the composer often successfully imparts rhythmic independence." Edward Kravitt, "[Review]," *Notes*, 2nd Ser., 18, no. 4 (September 1961): 657.

¹¹¹ See, for example, Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Lawrence Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); and *idem.*, "Decadence and Desire: the *Wilhelm Meister* Songs of Wolf and Schubert," *19th Century Music* 10, no. 3 (Spring 1987): 229-242. Kramer has published widely on such topics; the latter article is especially notable for his direct comments on Cone's approach.

Babbitt's setting is that the piano does not directly represent *Du*, but represents *Ich*'s thoughts and perceptions of *Du*. That is, *Du* remains the object of *Ich*'s gaze throughout each song.

In some sense Babbitt, as composer, gives the personas life; his song setting can be seen as “a poem on the poem”¹¹²—a unique creation in its own right. In similar fashion, my analysis adds yet another layer of interpretation, rooted in Stramm's text as realized in the musical world created by Babbitt.¹¹³ For example, while Stramm's poetry includes little action, my interpretation of Babbitt's setting creates a physical dimension to the personas. Unlike Cone or Lewin, however, I do not necessarily ascribe my interpretation of the text-music relationship to the composer. I do not doubt that Babbitt is keenly aware of traditional practices of word-painting and expressivity in vocal works, even if he does not typically discuss such elements.¹¹⁴ When questioned about how poetic meaning may have shaped the musical structures and relationships in *Vision and Prayer*, Babbitt offered:

I certainly worked very hard on the rhythmic dispositions, all the things which I spoke about in the notes, but it would be ridiculous for me, for example, if when the text says “christen down the sky,” I didn't have certain kinds of implications of textures. ... [But] in setting “Vision and Prayer” I was much more concerned with the sonic, rhythmic, and syntactical aspects than with the ideational aspects.¹¹⁵

Some of the musical features I highlight in *Du* may have been intended compositional decisions, but my analysis does not depend on that fact. I am arguing that some of the “ideational aspects” of text setting, particularly the representation of vocal personas, are inherent

¹¹² David Lewin, “*Auf dem Flusse*: Structure and Expression in a Schubert Song,” *Schubert: Critical and Analytical Studies*, ed. Walter Frisch (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 127. See also Lewin's song analyses “Toward the Analysis of a Schoenberg Song (Op. 15, No. XI),” *Perspectives of New Music* 12, no. 1/2 (Autumn 1973-Summer 1974): 43-86; and “A Way into Schoenberg's Opus 15, Number 7,” *In Theory Only* 6, no. 1 (November 1981): 3-24.

¹¹³ Dare I call this analysis “a poem on the poem on the poem”? I simply mean to establish that this reading of Babbitt's text setting goes beyond poetic analysis and looks to how the poetic personas come to life in novel ways.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, his analyses of Schoenberg's *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten* and *Moses und Aron* in “Three Essays on Schoenberg,” *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*, 222-236. Likewise, among the analyses of *Du* cited above, only John Rahn pays any significant attention to the text.

¹¹⁵ Babbitt, “Milton Babbitt,” 49-50.

to Babbitt's musical language. Further, this idea of the presence of musical subjects can, I believe, even extend to his instrumental works. Despite the stereotypes of his music as pointillistic or fragmented, wisps of melodic lines and gestures emerge upon extended listening, and suggest a potential for perceived human communication. Greg Sandow seemed to sense this as well when he encouraged listeners trying to follow Babbitt's music to imagine themselves singing along.¹¹⁶ As for Babbitt's vocal works, identification with the human voice and agency is immediately evident. Borrowing again from Cumming, the musical subject—or persona—I seek to illuminate

...can be understood not as a free-wheeling imposition by the listener of his or her own states on those of the music, but as something heard "in the music" that is found to confront him or her, or to invite identification. Musical personae are not the ephemeral masks behind which the composer's face can be discerned, but neither are they the distorted reflection of one engaged in listening. They inhere to the text of the work itself, as it is performed, inviting the listener's engagement in a manner that transforms his or her own subjectivity.¹¹⁷

Of course, Cumming's discussion of musical subjectivity is rooted in the tonal tradition; but as Mackey's analysis of *Arie da Capo* showed, it is also possible to isolate elements of vocality, gesture, and agency within the context of a given Babbitt composition. In the following analysis of *Du*, I frame my exploration of Babbitt's musical gestures within the drama of Stramm's poetry—that is, I seek to describe the many musical and textual interactions of the personas *Ich* and *Du*. What follows is more-or-less a "guided tour" of the musical-poetic world of *Ich* and *Du*, progressing chronologically through the work. Uniting this expedition are underlying tropes of interpersonal relationships and distance as expressed in song.

¹¹⁶ Sandow, "A Fine Madness," 255.

¹¹⁷ Cumming, "The Subjectivities of 'Erbarne Dich,'" 17.

I. Wiedersehen – See Again

<i>Dein Schreiten bebt</i>	<i>Your walking quakes</i>
<i>In Schauen stirbt der Blick</i>	<i>In looking, the glance dies</i>
<i>Der Wind</i>	<i>The wind</i>
<i>Spielt</i>	<i>plays</i>
<i>Blasse Bänder.</i>	<i>faint volumes.</i>
<i>Du</i>	<i>You</i>
<i>Wendest</i>	<i>turn</i>
<i>Fort!</i>	<i>away!</i>
<i>Den Raum umwirbt die Zeit!</i>	<i>Time haunts the room!</i> ¹¹⁸

The first song opens with an austere descending i8 (E4 – A-flat2) in the piano, which signals the entrance of the vocal line on E-flat5 and ushers us into the musical world of poetic personas *Ich* and *Du*.¹¹⁹ The opening word, *Dein*, is perceived melodically as an anacrusis propelling us forward into the rest of the vocal phrase¹²⁰ and poetically as a possessive pronoun encouraging us to question identities: Who is *Du*? Who is speaking? What is their relationship?

The speaker¹²¹ does not refer to him/herself directly until the second song, and does not address *Du* directly until measure 7 of the first song. Instead we find *Ich* observing *Du*'s actions from a distance, and through the soprano part we come to see what *Ich* sees: *Dein Schreiten bebt*. *Ich* gazes at the anonymous *Du* walking by, while the piano part strides along with *Du* in triplets.

No sooner has the vocalist enunciated the final word of the phrase (*bebt*, downbeat of m. 2) than the piano interrupts with an extreme leap (C-sharp1 – F-sharp6). The timing and disjunct motion contribute to a feeling of disconnect between performers and, perhaps, between *Ich* and *Du*. This incongruity foreshadows *Du*'s subsequent departure, and attests to the complex

¹¹⁸ All translations, unless otherwise credited, are my own.

¹¹⁹ For this analysis, pitch names are assigned according to middle C = C4. Interval (mod 12) is abbreviated “i” and interval class is denoted “ic.”

¹²⁰ The term “phrase” is understood as a logical grouping of pitches with distinct start and finish. In the vocal line, phrases typically align with the poetic structure and are often set apart by rests. Formal segmentation according to Babbitt’s use of trichordal arrays and its influence on musical phrasing will be discussed further in the following chapter.

¹²¹ Technically, upon first hearing this phrase could be understood as originating with several speakers addressing *Du* collectively. It will become clear from the text of subsequent songs that the first person singular *Ich*, and not the first person plural *Wir*, is the speaker in this context.

relationship that shapes the progression of the entire cycle. Additionally, dynamics and rhythmic durations of this first vocal phrase swell and release, supported by analogous dynamics and texture in the accompaniment. This wave-like gesture, surging forward only to subside once again, recurs throughout the song; the contours and phrasing of the vocal line speak to *Ich*'s desirous, yet unfulfilled, existence.

Example 1: "Wiedersehen," mm. 1-2

The next vocal phrase builds in dynamics and register, culminating on G5 in measure 3, which accentuates the word *Blick*. The vocal line could easily have followed the path B-flat4 – A-flat4 – G4 (thus completing a melodic arch in measures 2-4), but instead leaps to the higher G5 as the piano tumbles downward to a low E1. This gesture, eschewing musical expectation, further identifies *Du* as the object of the narrator's gaze—enticing yet unattainable.

I imagine the scene unfolding as follows: *Ich* has been staring at *Du* from afar, and suddenly *Du* turns toward *Ich* and their eyes meet momentarily. Startled, *Ich*'s directed gaze is subsequently broken (*In Schauen stirbt der Blick*). In that time, a soft wind blows through the space occupied by the two personas, as *Ich* stands there transfixed on this now fleeting encounter with *Du*. Musically, this same wind carries with it faint volumes (*blasse Bänder*), or echoes, of

the opening vocal phrase, this time played an octave higher by the piano in measures 4-5. In addition, the ebb and flow of dynamics and melodic contour of the vocal line and an overall descending melodic motion in measures 4-7 (linear progression G5 – F-sharp5 – F5 – E5) also evoke the poetic imagery of a breeze carrying away *Ich*'s ephemeral memories of *Du*.

Example 2: "Wiedersehen," mm. 4-8

The musical score for "Wiedersehen" mm. 4-8 is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 4-5) features a vocal line starting with a *mf* dynamic, followed by a *p* dynamic, then *mf* and *p*, and finally *pp* and *p*. The piano accompaniment includes triplets and an octave sign (8) in measure 5. The second system (measures 6-8) shows a vocal line with *pp*, *ff*, and *mf* dynamics, ending with *p*. The piano accompaniment features a *pp* dynamic in measure 6, *f* and *ff* dynamics in measure 7, and *mf* and *p* dynamics in measure 8. An octave sign (8) is also present in measure 7. The lyrics are: "Blick Der Wind spielt blas - se Bän - der Du wen - dest fort! Den".

As if suddenly coming to his/her senses, *Ich*'s tone changes abruptly in measure 7, for the first time naming *Du* directly and somewhat aggressively.¹²² The change of address is

¹²² Even with the words *Du wendest fort!*, it is unclear whether or not *Ich* is speaking to *Du* or simply continuing with the detached surveillance. I could easily interpret this scenario as *Ich* speaking at *Du* (in response to *Du*'s

accompanied by a change in musical affect—*forte* and *fortissimo* pitches in piano and voice accent the words *Du wendest fort!* The piano and voice at first convey a commanding strength and stability with the sound of the diatonic hexachord ([024579], in this case the white keys C-D-E-F-G-A on the piano in mm. 6-7 plus E5 in the vocal line on *Du wen-*), but the insistent pressure of repeated A5s in measure 7 forces a move to the hexachord's complement—a tangible shift from white keys to black keys on the piano.¹²³

Accompanying the insistent A5s and change in hexachords indicating *Du*'s curt rejection of *Ich*, the vocal phrase *Du wendest fort!* is echoed clearly by the piano in measure 8. The pitches E6, E-flat7, and D-flat7 appear in the top piano line, mirroring the previous vocal line, and the contour E6 – F5 – D-flat7 solidifies the aural connection between the two gestures.

The second occurrence of the *wendest fort* gesture delays the dramatic momentum, as *Ich* is consumed by indignant disbelief. However, this slightly altered version (leaping down to F5 instead of E-flat5) suggests that *Du*'s presence cannot last, and a lower D-C motion in the left hand asserts a cadential effect, thus confirming that *Du* has indeed left. The speaker is left alone, as *Den Raum umwirbt die Zeit*.

The vocalist ends the song with faint accompaniment (m. 10), and then gives way to a piano interlude that elaborates on the isolation experienced upon *Du*'s rejection.¹²⁴ The first half of the interlude (mm. 10-12) spins out a series of dyads (E6 – F-sharp6, B-flat3 – B3, G5 – G-sharp5, and A5-B5) that strain upward, yet achieve no resolution. The heard rhythmic pulse

rejection) without expecting a reply. The change of address from *Dein* to *Du* is, nonetheless, striking: it is not only *Du*'s alluring actions but *Du*'s entire presence that *Ich* is fixating on.

¹²³ Babbitt also exploits this technique in his piano piece *Duet* (1956). Standard analysis of Babbitt's trichordal array in these measures would illustrate how the [013679] all-combinatorial hexachord is generated between the voice and upper piano part and between the lower two piano parts. However, the segmentation alluded to in the present analysis highlights the [024579] hexachord present between voice and piano in measures 6-7. Discussions such as these will be taken up in greater detail in Chapter Three.

¹²⁴ Christopher F. Hasty describes this compositional technique of starting a vocal phrase only to complete it with the accompaniment (in this case the piano interlude) as rather Schumann-esque. See his analysis of the first two songs of *Du* in *Meter as Rhythm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 275-281.

varies as triple and duple subdivisions of the beat create a *rubato* effect, well suited for the thoughts spinning around in *Ich*'s head. The dyad motives give way to trichords in the second half of the interlude (mm. 13-14), which alternate between arpeggiated triplet-sixteenth notes and simultaneities. The interruption by crisp simultaneities engenders a striking change in affect, as if *Ich* is regaining consciousness.

II. Wankelmut – Fickleness

<i>Mein Suchen sucht!</i>	<i>My seeking seeks!</i>
<i>Viel tausend wandeln Ich!</i>	<i>Many thousand change I!</i>
<i>Ich taste Ich</i>	<i>I feel I</i>
<i>Und fasse Du</i>	<i>and catch You</i>
<i>Und halte Dich!</i>	<i>and keep You!</i>
<i>Versehne Ich!</i>	<i>Lose I!</i>
<i>Und Du und Du und Du</i>	<i>And You and You and You</i>
<i>Viel tausend Du</i>	<i>many thousand You</i>
<i>Und immer Du</i>	<i>and always You</i>
<i>Allwege Du</i>	<i>all ways You</i>
<i>Wirr</i>	<i>confused</i>
<i>Wirren</i>	<i>confuse</i>
<i>Wirrer</i>	<i>confused</i>
<i>Immer wirrer</i>	<i>ever more confused</i>
<i>Durch</i>	<i>by</i>
<i>Die Wirrnis</i>	<i>this confusion</i>
<i>Du</i>	<i>You</i>
<i>Dich</i>	<i>To You</i>
<i>Ich!</i>	<i>I!</i>

The succinct simultaneities concluding the piano interlude set the scene for *Ich*'s gripping monologue in “Wankelmut.” The unaccompanied opening vocal phrase, *Mein Suchen sucht*, expresses the speaker's self-recognition for the first time. The position of *Mein* at the outset of the song clearly refers back to the initial *Dein* in “Wiedersehen,” thus placing the two characters, *Ich* and *Du*, in direct comparison. With the doubled tempo of “Wankelmut” and upward jolt of the vocal line, *Mein Suchen sucht* presents itself as primary over the memory of the subdued,

descending phrase, *Dein Schreiten bebt*. This contrast illuminates the identity politics at work in the text: *Ich*'s self-identification comes only by positioning him/herself in opposition to *Du*, who serves as both *Ich*'s object of desire and a projection of *Ich*'s greatest fears.¹²⁵ Throughout the text, *Ich*'s fixation on *Du* is mixed with reassertions of self (... *wandeln Ich, Ich taste Ich, versehne Ich!*) as if to avoid losing individuality in the midst of yearning for *Du*, culminating with the inseparable *Du Dich Ich!*

The vocalist collaborates with the piano through a sort of call and response in measures 15-19, and this interaction is greatly intensified as *Ich* attempts to catch (*fasse*), keep (*halte*) and possess *Du* in measures 20-27. The piano and vocal parts increasingly coincide, picking up rhythmic momentum as *Ich* pursues *Du*. The sense of increased tension and momentum is largely a result of the repeated gesture on *taste Ich* and *fasse Du* (mm. 19-20), heard as a near replicate of the opening vocal line on *Suchen sucht*. The momentum is compounded in measures 20-21, where the piano and voice rely less on call-and-response, and instead attack at the same time, particularly on the words *Ich* (end of m. 19), *Du*, and *Dich*. The accusative pronoun *Dich* is especially highlighted in measure 21 because of the piano's rest before and after, placing *Ich* and *Du* in a new level of confrontation, with *Du* as the object.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ "Stramm has come to the limits of language in trying to express his experience and turns the other person into an abstract force which lies beyond normal comprehension and which overpowers his individuality." M. S. Jones, *Der Sturm: A Focus of Expressionism* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1984), 147

¹²⁶ Technically, the verb *fassen* should take the accusative case as well.

Example 3: “Wankelmut,” mm. 20-24

und fas - se Du Und hal - - - te Dich! Ver -
seh - - - ne Ich! Und Du, und Du, und Du

Inevitably, *Ich* is unable to maintain a grasp on the transient *Du* (marked by a mournful *Versehne Ich!* in measures 21-22), and *Du* remains an object of obsession and source of confusion. As if fixated on this mystical Other, *Ich* reiterates this obsession by calling out to *Du* six more times during measures 23-27, including a leap up to C6 in measure 24, the highest note for the soprano in the entire cycle.¹²⁷ As suggested in Stramm’s poetry, the rhythmic impetus of the previous vocal phrases (*taste Ich, fasse Du, halte Dich*) is disrupted with the three repetitions of *Und Du*, further accenting the object of *Ich*’s musings. The infatuation is multiplied as *Ich*

¹²⁷ This unexpected ascending leap harkens back to the *Blick* gesture in “Wiedersehen” (mm. 3-4) and will also be heard in several subsequent songs.

describes *Viel tausend Du*, which we too can hear: the E5 – E-flat5 – D-flat5 of the vocal line is echoed twice by the piano, E5 – E-flat4 - D-flat4 in measure 25 and E6 – E-flat6 – D-flat6 in measure 26.¹²⁸

Example 4: “Wankelmut,” mm. 24-27

With images of *Du* tormenting *Ich*'s brain, *Ich* becomes caught up in the confusion, demonstrated by the wordplay on *wirr* in measures 28-31.¹²⁹ The vocal line lacks accompanimental support, with the piano and voice attacks almost never aligning until the final *wirr*-word (*die Wirrnis*, end of m. 30). The closing vocal phrase, a juxtaposition of poetic personas, *Du Dich Ich*, once again leaves *Ich* all alone, ending *piano* over the sustained accompaniment.

¹²⁸ This gesture should be played once more by the lowest piano register in measure 28, but this {4,3,1} segment of the trichordal array was omitted. The linear [013] trichord A-flat2 – G-flat2 – F1 played by the left hand in measure 25, however, could be heard as a substitute “echo.”

¹²⁹ Patrick Bridgwater translates *wirr* as “mazed,” which seems to capture the poetic rhythm and wordplay better. David Miller and Stephen Watts, eds. *Music While Drowning: German Expressionist Poems* (London: Tate, 2003), 37.

III. Begegnung – Encounter

<i>Dein Gehen lächelt in mich über</i>	<i>Your walking smiles across to me</i>
<i>Und</i>	<i>and</i>
<i>Reißt das Herz.</i>	<i>rends my heart.</i>
<i>Das Nicken hakt und spannt.</i>	<i>Your nodding hooks and tenses.</i>
<i>Im Schatten deines Rocks</i>	<i>In the shadow of your skirt</i>
<i>Verhaspelt</i>	<i>tangles</i>
<i>Schlingern</i>	<i>swinging</i>
<i>Schleudert</i>	<i>flings</i>
<i>Klatscht!</i>	<i>flaps!</i>
<i>Du wiegst und wiegst.</i>	<i>You sway and sway</i>
<i>Mein Greifen haschet blind.</i>	<i>my grasping snatches blindly.</i>
<i>Die Sonne lacht!</i>	<i>The sun laughs!</i>
<i>Und</i>	<i>And</i>
<i>Blödes Zagen lahmet fort</i>	<i>craven wavering limps away</i>
<i>Beraubt beraubt!</i>	<i>Bereft bereft!¹³⁰</i>

As the final B-flat4 on the word *Ich* dissolves into the accompaniment's A3, the opening piano phrase of "Begegnung" (mm. 33-34) responds to the concluding vocal line of the previous song: the piano reverses the melodic direction by ascending A3 – F-sharp4 – B4 and ending with a sustained E-flat6 isolated in the upper register, just as *Ich* stood alone in measure 32.¹³¹ This brief interlude gives way to *Ich*'s narrative describing an encounter (*Begegnung*) with *Du*.

Under the gaze of *Ich*, *Du*'s walking (*Gehen*), nodding (*Nicken*), and even apparel (*Rock*), factor into *Ich*'s perception of the object of desire. *Ich* acknowledges that *Du* possesses a power that affects *Ich* greatly; *Du*'s mere presence rends *Ich*'s heart (*reißt das Herz*). In measures 35-39, the vocal and piano parts sound mainly in alternation—an indication of the perpetual distance between *Ich* and *Du*.

The description of *Du* walking by (*Verhaspelt Schlingern Schleudert Klatscht!*) is set to a static, sultry piano line (m. 40). Creeping ic1s in the piano part, the left hand moving in parallel

¹³⁰ Translated by Bridgwater, *Music While Drowning*, 39.

¹³¹ These four notes are perceived as the relatively stable and familiar sound of an inverted Mm 7th chord (B⁷). As will be discussed later in this chapter, Babbitt exploits a similar triadic sound very clearly in song VI, "Traum."

motion with the vocal line, provide a sustained dissonance. Text alliteration and repeated pitches and fixated rhythmic pattern in the music draw attention to this passage and contribute to *Ich*'s obsessive depiction of *Du*. The vocal line climbs E4 – F4 and then leaps to a *forte* G5, finally shattering the established rhythmic pattern of Stramm's poetry and Babbitt's musical setting.

Example 5: "Begegnung," mm. 39-40

The musical score for Example 5, "Begegnung," mm. 39-40, is presented in a two-staff format. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic, followed by a triplet of eighth notes (*p*), then a quarter note (*mp*), and finally a half note (*f*) with an accent. The lyrics are "Ver - haspelt Schlingern Schleudert Klatscht!". The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex bass line in the left hand, with dynamics ranging from *pp* to *f*.

Yet *Du* effortlessly sways past *Ich* (*Du wiegst und wiegst*), lightly accompanied by the same pitch classes (E5 – F4 – G3 in mm. 41-42) *Ich* had just sung, as if incessantly hanging on *Du*'s every action. For this, however, *Ich* is sternly rebuked and ultimately rejected. In measure 46, the piano echoes the previous *lahmet fort* vocal gesture; the rhythmic values are distorted in the piano version, but the pitches and contour of the left hand bring out the connection. This echo, similar to the piano gesture following *Die Sonne lacht!* in measure 45, conveys the sardonic effect of the sun—or *Du*—laughing at *Ich* (as suggested by the text). The gesture is also reminiscent of the *Du wendest fort!* gesture described in "Wiedersehen." The contrast and power struggle is clear: *Du* proudly turns away, while *Ich* despondently limps away. The

pianist's left hand pounds *fortissimo* on D2 and the soprano sings the final phrase *Beraubt beraubt!*, signaling *Ich*'s exasperated resignation.

Example 6: "Begegnung," mm. 44-46

Die Son-ne lacht! Und blö - des Za - gen lah-met fort

IV. Verzweifelt – Desperate

Droben schmettert ein greller Stein
Nacht grant Glas
Die Zeiten stehn
Ich
Steine.
Weit
Glast
Du!

Over there a glaring stone shatters
night grains glass
the times stand still
I
stone.
Far-off
you
*glass!*¹³²

The brief fourth song, "Verzweifelt," makes explicit the binary opposition of *Ich* and *Du*. Stramm's poetic text employs the imagery of stone and glass, historic tropes for irreconcilable difference. The first two lines of the poem dismantle these disparate images: the stone shatters and the glass grains (breaks down into small particles), yet the poem continues with the characters retaining their contrasting identities: *Ich steine* and *Du glast*. Instead of using

¹³² Translated by Bridgwater, *Music While Drowning*, 38.

metaphors—*Ich bin ein Stein* and *Du bist ein Glas*—Stramm transforms these nouns into verbs, which conveys an impression that the personas' incompatibility lies deep within their actions and essence.¹³³

“Verzweifelt” opens with a ringing ascending i7 (D5 – A5) in the piano part,¹³⁴ which gradually unfolds in note-by-note alternation between the hands. The texture and range of the accompaniment is noticeably reduced, particularly in the first half of the song, measures 49-52. The two distinct piano lines remain within the treble range (lowest note A3) with no simultaneities. Over the light accompaniment, each vocal phrase encompasses four pitches, and, unlike the other songs, does not repeat any pitches for additional syllables.¹³⁵

For almost the entire song, voice and piano do not attack notes at the same time, which parallels the incongruence between *Ich* and *Du* and the perceived distance between them. One exception is the piano-voice simultaneities in measures 52-53, which cause a temporary pause in the musical progression (*Die Zeiten stehen*). This point also stands out because of the piano's notes extend into a notably lower range than in the first half of the song.

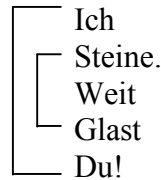
The final vocal phrase, measures 55-56, ascends and crescendos to the final word *Du*, with increased rhythmic activity in the accompaniment. This ends the song in a rather unsettled manner, yet the culmination on the word *Du* fits the desperate (*Verzweifelt*) longing of *Ich* for

¹³³ “Verbs, which of their nature place reality under the aspect of time and enable us to see it as a constantly evolving process, are best suited to capture the essence of something for ever moving and for ever moved.” Waller, *Expressionist Poetry and Its Critics*, 33.

¹³⁴ Although there is a pause between the two songs, it is worth noting that “Begegnung” ends with linear ic5 in measures 47-48 in the piano (D2 – G1) and voice (C-sharp5 – G-sharp4) as well as ic5 formed between voice and piano (E-flat2 – G-sharp4). This vertical sonority expands by semitone to D5 – A5 with shift in register at the start of “Verzweifelt.” The aural connection between the two ic5s is perceptible, and actually continues into the measure: C5 (voice) and G4 (piano); F-sharp6 (piano) and D-flat5 (voice); E4 (piano) and B5 (piano); E-flat4 (voice) and B-flat5 (piano). Linearly, ic5s are also formed melodically in the piano part. Although brief, these measures of overlapping ic5s stand out as a point of perceived consonant stability within the song cycle.

¹³⁵ From a compositional standpoint, the reason for the texture change and vocal phrasing is that one piano voice has been omitted in “Verzweifelt,” leaving three lines (two piano plus vocal) to maintain aggregate formation via combinatorial tetrachords. As will be discussed in the following chapter, a blend of tetrachordal phrasing in the vocal line and trichordal phrasing in the piano lines creates an interesting four-against-three texture.

Du. This distance is suggested further by the text, in which the poetic chiasmus pairs the two subjects (*Ich* and *Du*) and their opposing noun/verbs (*Steine*, *Glast*) around the word *Weit*.



This rhetorical construction is mirrored in the phrasing, dynamics, and pitch content of the vocal line. Centered around the dyad on *Weit*, the phrasing creates a nearly symmetrical rhythmic pattern, and the pitches, descending in small leaps on *Ich Steine*. ascend in a similar (although not exact) fashion with *glast Du!* The crux of the passage, *Weit (far-off)*, marks the insurmountable distance between the two personas, and is sung with a fitting, desperate sigh, particularly disconsolate after following a similar gesture on *Steine*. Yet the upward driving conclusion on *Du!* hints that *Ich* has not lost all hope, leading appropriately into the next song.

Example 7: “Verzweifelt,” mm. 53-56

The musical score for Example 7, "Verzweifelt," mm. 53-56, is presented in a two-staff format. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The vocal line lyrics are: "Ich Stei - ne Weit ——— glast ——— Du!". The piano accompaniment features a bass line with triplets and a treble line with various dynamics. Dynamics in the vocal line include *f*, *mf*, *p*, *pp*, *mp*, and *mf*. Dynamics in the piano accompaniment include *f*, *mf*, *mp*, *p*, and *pp*.

V. Allmacht – Omnipotence

<i>Forschen Fragen</i>	<i>Searching questioning</i>
<i>Du trägst Antwort</i>	<i>You carry the answer</i>
<i>Fliehen Fürchten</i>	<i>Fleeing fearing</i>
<i>Du stehst Mut!</i>	<i>You stand in courage</i>
<i>Stank und Unrat</i>	<i>Stanch and refuse</i>
<i>Du breitest Reine</i>	<i>You spread purity</i>
<i>Falsch und Tücke</i>	<i>Falsity and malice</i>
<i>Du lachst Recht!</i>	<i>You laugh at the law</i>
<i>Wahn Verzweiflung</i>	<i>Delusion distress</i>
<i>Du schmiegest Selig</i>	<i>You nestle blessedness</i>
<i>Tod und Elend</i>	<i>Death and misery</i>
<i>Du wärmst Reich!</i>	<i>You warm wealth</i>
<i>Hoch und Abgrund</i>	<i>Height and abyss</i>
<i>Du bogst Wege</i>	<i>You form paths</i>
<i>Hölle Teufel</i>	<i>Hell devil</i>
<i>Du siegst Gott!</i>	<i>You triumph over God!¹³⁶</i>

“Allmacht,” like “Wankelmut,” begins with nearly unaccompanied voice, which strains forward with the first note of each vocal dyad (m. 57). This song continues *Ich*’s quest for the elusive *Du*, fixating on the mystical answers and powers *Du* supposedly possesses. The text, by far the longest poem set in the song cycle, enumerates pairs of sentences in which *Du* is defined *ex negativo*—through contrast to evils threatening *Ich*. For each negative worry about the material world named by *Ich* in the text, the subsequent line identifies ways in which *Du* transcends or conquers these trials.¹³⁷ For example, *Fliehen Fürchten* is paired with *Du stehst Mut!* The word *Du* initiates every other vocal phrase throughout the song, marking *Ich*’s continued obsession with *Du*, whom *Ich* perceives as somehow able to redeem and enlighten. Dynamic accents typically emphasize the highest note of each vocal phrase, which brings out an

¹³⁶ “It is evident from the capital letters that the words ‘Selig’ and ‘Reich’ are not adjectives, but substantives meaning ‘Seligkeit’ and ‘Reichtum.’ Similarly, in line 13, ‘Hoch,’ although necessarily having a capital letter because of its primary position in the verse-line, is not used adjectivally but substantivally, meaning ‘Höhe’ as a pendant to ‘Abgrund.’” G. R. B. Perkins, “Stramm: His Attempts to Revitalise the Language of Poetry,” *New German Studies* 4 (1976): 143.

¹³⁷ Karin von Abrams, “The ‘Du’ of August Stramm’s *Liebesgedichte*,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 18, no. 4 (October 1982): 305.

overall upward striving. From measure 64 to 72, in response to each of *Ich*'s concerns, the word *Du* is assigned a pitch higher than those in the previous (negative/worldly) vocal phrase.

Du does not seem to be physically present in this song, but is fetishized as an antidote for the anxiety and worldly strife experienced by *Ich*. Each line of the poem projects forward to the next by a regular metrical pattern (4-4-4-3 syllables per line) and creates a clear rhythmic drive. It is this distinct rhythmic impetus that characterizes this song; *Ich*'s obsession is carried out in the phrasing and motivic repetition, constantly returning to thoughts of *Du*. The song setting does not always maintain the textual pairing, however: three vocal phrases appear in rapid succession within a larger phrase group (mm. 63-65), which is demarcated by brief piano interjections on either side (mm. 62, 65). Comparable piano flourishes also separate pairs of vocal phrases from measure 66 forward. While the specific contours, rhythms, and pitch content of the vocal line's trichords vary throughout the song, the general long-short-long-(short) rhythmic pattern connects the vocal phrases, contributing to the cyclic effect of *Ich*'s recurring images of *Du*.

The rhythmic momentum of these vocal phrases leads, finally, to the *forte* epitome of *Ich*'s worldly fears, *Hölle Teufel*, measure 75. The vocal line on *Teufel* is reinforced by high piano simultaneities, which stand out as a rare occurrence of piano and voice attacking together in the song. The piano's left hand plays low sixteenth notes (end of m. 75), projecting the phrase forward, which is answered by a *fortissimo* evocation of the almighty (*Allmacht*)—*Du*. An unexpected leap up to B-flat⁵ on *siegst* disrupts the long-short rhythmic pattern by placing the stress on the second word of the phrase. This gesture is similar to the other “unexpected leap” gestures mentioned above (*Blick, Du, Klatsch!*), but does not fall on the final word of the phrase, instead leaping down to abruptly conclude the song on an F-sharp⁴ *Gott*. The overall effect is

that of a questionable resolution. The vocal line concludes definitively on *Gott*, but this is undermined by the piano’s A5 – G-sharp6 ringing clear right before the vocalist’s final word. The abrupt ending terminates the rhythmic drive and overall ascending motion of the song, leaving the frenzied *Ich*, and the vocalist, gasping for air.

Example 8: “Allmacht,” mm. 75-77

VI. Traum – Dream

*Durch die Büsche winden Sterne
Augen tauchen blaken sinken
Flüstern plätschert
Blüten gehren
Düfte spritzen
Schauer stürzen
Winde schnellen prellen schwellen
Tücher reißen
Fallen schrickt in tiefe Nacht.*

*Through the bushes wind stars
eyes submerge film sink
whispering babbles
blossoms cleave
perfumes spray
showers deluge
winds hurry flurry scurry
sheets tear
Falling startles into deep night.¹³⁸*

After the dynamic final measures of “Allmacht,” an inverted triad (D-flat6 – F5 – A-flat4) gently guides the music into a soporific world of Stramm’s enchanting imagery. *Ich* and

¹³⁸ Translated by Bridgwater, *Music While Drowning*, 36.

Du are both absent from this dream (*Traum*), but because all of the poems discussed thus far have come from *Ich*'s perspective, we can assume to be situated within *Ich*'s dream. Mentions of eyes, showers, winds, and night in the text connect to *Ich*'s earlier visions of *Du*. Moreover, the triadic melody and waltz gestures (Example 9) in the piano's left hand part create a world far from the earthly concerns expressed by *Ich* in the previous songs.¹³⁹

Example 9: "Traum," mm. 78-80

The musical score for Example 9, "Traum," mm. 78-80, is presented in three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, the middle staff is the piano right hand, and the bottom staff is the piano left hand. The time signature is 3/4. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The vocal line begins in measure 79 with the lyrics "Durch die Büsche winden Sterne". The piano accompaniment features a waltz-like triadic melody in the left hand, marked *pp* and *p*. The right hand has a more complex melodic line with triplets and slurs.

The poetry's trochaic meter is brought out by the long-short rhythm of the vocal dyads, which also accentuate common vowel sounds such as *Flüstern...Blüten... Düfte...stürzen* (mm. 83-87) and rhymes *schnellen prellen schwellen* (mm. 88-89).¹⁴⁰ The vocal phrasing of primarily dyads makes the trichords of the opening and final vocal phrases (A4 – C5 – E5 and F-sharp4 – A4 – C-sharp5, respectively) stand out even more. The T₉ relationship and the similar accompaniment between measure 79, *Durch die Büsche*, and measures 90-91, *Fallen schrickt*, establishes some sense of a formal recapitulation. This connection can be extended to

¹³⁹ For another rendition of waltz gestures, see Babbitt's *Minute Waltz* (1977), discussed in Susan Blaustein and Martin Brody, "Criteria for Grouping in Milton Babbitt's *Minute Waltz* (or) $3/4 \pm 1/8$," *Perspectives of New Music* 24, no. 2 (1986): 30-87.

¹⁴⁰ This gesture was foreshadowed in the "straining" dyads that open "Allmacht," measure 57, and will figure significantly in the final song, "Schwermut."

encompass the entire opening and closing phrases (mm. 79-80, 90-92), which maintains a clear T_3/T_9 relationship. The final measures of “Traum” conclude *pianissimo* as *Ich* is awoken following a dream of falling (*Fallen schrickt in tiefe Nacht*). *Ich* is then left alone as the dream imagery fades into the enveloping darkness. The accompaniment moves directly into the second piano interlude, measures 93-98, which serves to fully awaken *Ich* and transition into the final song.

Example 10: “Traum,” mm. 90-92

VII. Schwermut – Melancholy

Schreiten Streben
Leben sehnt
Schauern Stehen
Blicke suchen
Sterben wächst
Das Kommen
Schreit!
Tief
Stummen
Wir.

Striding striving
living longs
shuddering standing
glances clue
dying grows
the coming
screams!
Deeply
we
*dumb.*¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Translated by Bridgwater, *Music While Drowning*, 38.

Ich's varying accounts of pursuing *Du* and enduring rejection are united in this final song, "Schwermut," which brings to a climax the increasingly complicated relationship between the two characters. The text describes a scene in which *Du* finally concedes to *Ich*'s advances. *Ich* and *Du* are never mentioned separately: the only pronoun in the song is the plural *Wir* (m. 105). With this, verbs-turned-nouns, heavy with raw physicality and explicit meaning, create a rhythmic drive that mounts with each passing line until the climactic phase of the poem, the song, and the relationship—*Das Kommen schreit!*¹⁴²

Musically, much of the vocal line is constructed in "straining" (or "sighing") dyads, foreshadowed in "Allmacht" and "Traum." The pairs of notes elongate the similar vowel sound in *Streben ... Leben ... Stehen* before a sliding descent on the second syllable. The final build-up in "Schwermut," the culmination of the song cycle, is rather compressed, marked by amplified dynamics and rhythmic impetus from measure 103. There is progressively less silence between each vocal phrase from measures 100-101 to the climax at measure 104, with an increase in dynamics from *forte* to *fortissimo* on *schreit*. The piano, especially the left hand part, increases in rhythmic activity (angular 16th- and 8th-note gestures) in measures 103-104.

The climax of the song (and presumably the relationship) fades away soon after, leaving the poetic personas *Ich* and *Du* in silence: *Tief stummen wir* (mm. 104-105).¹⁴³ These final measures lack the conclusive fulfillment *Ich* was seeking—the answers *Du* supposedly possessed; instead self-identity is subsumed into *Wir* and *Ich* is resigned to the melancholy (*Schwermut*) reality that *Du* remains impossible to possess.

The final vocal phrase is a clear T₁₀ transposition of the song cycle's opening vocal phrase (in "Wiedersehen," E-flat5 – C5 – F4, *Dein Schreiten bebt*), supporting the observation

¹⁴² See Stramm's *Trieb (Urge)*, which appears as the final song in Babbitt's *Mehr "Du"* for mezzo-soprano, viola, and piano (1991).

¹⁴³ *Stummen* is Stramm's neologism from *stumm*, which means *dumb* or *silent*.

that little has changed from *Du*'s original rejections. The piano continues on briefly, *pianissimo*, until “life peters out into cavernous silence.”¹⁴⁴

Example 11: “Schwermut,” mm. 103-105

The musical score for "Schwermut" (mm. 103-105) is presented in three systems. The top system shows the vocal line in treble clef, 4/4 time, with dynamics *mf*, *ff*, *p*, and *pp*. The lyrics are "Das Kom - men schreit! Tief stum - men wir." The middle system shows the piano accompaniment in treble clef, with dynamics *mf*, *ff*, *p*, and *pp*. The bottom system shows the piano accompaniment in bass clef, with dynamics *p*, *mf*, *ff*, *p*, *pp*, and *ppp*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Key words in “Schwermut” call into being earlier views of *Du*: *Schreiten* (m. 99), *Blicke* (m. 102), *Suchen* (m. 102), and *Sterben* (m. 103) all appeared in the first song, “Wiedersehen,” while *Tief* (m. 104) appeared in “Traum.”¹⁴⁵ These textual references help unify the song cycle and contribute to the above interpretation that the distance between *Ich* and *Du* is not resolved in the final song.

¹⁴⁴ Waller, *Expressionist Poetry and its Critics*, 32.

¹⁴⁵ However, “Schwermut” precedes “Wiedersehen” in Stramm’s published version of *Du*. Other textual connections include *Schauern* (m. 101), which is similar to *Schauen* (“Wiedersehen”) and *Schauer* (“Traum”); and the final *Wir*, which was foreshadowed by *umwirbt* (“Wiedersehen”) and the word play on *wirr* (“Wankelmut”).

CHAPTER THREE

Perception and Analysis

My analysis of Milton Babbitt's song cycle *Du* examined the musical realization of a series of vignettes—brief portraits of the turbulent relationship of poetic personas *Ich* and *Du*. Stramm's fragmented syntax and invented words packed with expressive meaning capture *Ich*'s tortuous thoughts and emotions, torn between attraction to and rejection from *Du*. Likewise, my reading of Babbitt's musical setting discussed gestures that present *Ich*'s perceptions and memories of *Du*.

My process for generating this analysis involved, first and foremost, extensive listening to the 1962 recording of *Du* featuring soprano Bethany Beardslee and pianist Robert Helps.¹⁴⁶ I focused my listening on isolating instances of gestural repetition, melodic contour (particularly in the vocal part), phrasing, and text-music relationships. Finally, I played through portions of the score on the piano and experimented with register and possible pitch orderings. Naturally, the more time I spent with the piece, the more connections I was able to make between different sections of the work. I do not feel that I have some privileged understanding of Babbitt's compositional style, and I have judiciously chosen particularly salient musical features that illustrate my interpretation of the text unfolding within Babbitt's musical world.

My interpretation of the poetic text, as illustrated by the perceived gestures, served as the context in which to situate my analysis of the piece. Some observations brought out the imagery of Stramm's poetry, while others focused on the poetic meter and phrasing. Recurring gestures

¹⁴⁶ Milton Babbitt, *Du*, Bethany Beardslee, soprano and Robert Helps, piano, Sun-Nova Records, 1962. My observations about vocal gestures were certainly shaped by Beardslee's performance.

helped to unify the analysis, such as the “escape gesture” of songs I, II, III, and V, and the related “straining” and “sighing” dyads of songs V, VI, and VII. My identification of familiar musical concepts—from basic repetition and contour to more advanced “sighing” and “waltz” gestures—reveals some of my culturally-influenced means of conceptualizing music. I presented the analysis largely as a diachronic progression through the piece, which captured short- and long-term connections between musical gestures in the form of “echoes.”

The aspects of text-music relationships and my interpretation of Stramm’s poetry as presented in Babbitt’s musical world are unabashedly subjective, but hopefully not “meaningless.” Throughout the analysis, I provided “evidence” for my observations in the form of musical descriptions and examples. I also included mention of certain structural elements of the song cycle, not because I feel that they are required to “prove” my subjective analysis, but because they illuminate some of the fascinating ways in which the compositional system and musical surface interact. This interaction merits further examination, which could lead to a better understanding of Babbitt’s compositional style and how one can conceptualize his music with one’s “musical mind.”

I. Comparing Analyses

First it would be helpful to establish the pitch structure underlying *Du*. Like many of Babbitt’s early works, *Du* is organized through trichordal arrays, achieving maximum compositional variety from a limited number of trichords. The piano part is split into three lines bounded by relative range (low, middle, high), while the vocal line is not restricted to a particular register. Within each appearance of the aggregate (typically occurring every 1-2 measures), the composer chooses what order to present the pitches. For example, the first array of the song

cycle is derived from [013] and [025] trichords, generating a [012345] hexachord in the voice and high piano parts, and a [024579] hexachord in the middle piano and low piano parts (Figure 1). But the actual pitches of the opening aggregate (mm. 1-2) unfold as shown in Figure 2, generating vertically-sounding [015] trichords.

Figure 1: Trichordal Array, “Wiedersehen,” mm. 1-5¹⁴⁷

VOICE	3	0	5	1	2	4	10	8	7	11	6	9
PIANO 1	11	6	9	10	8	7	1	2	4	3	0	5
PIANO 2	4	7	2	0	11	9	3	5	6	8	1	10
PIANO 3	8	1	10	3	5	6	0	11	9	4	7	2

Trichords: [013], [025]; Hexachords: [012345] (V-P1), [024579] (P2-P3)

Figure 2: Vertically Sounding Trichords, “Wiedersehen,” mm. 1-2

mm.	1				2				
V			3	0	5				
P1				11		6	9		
P2	4			7				2	
P3		8				1			10
	[015]		[015]		[015]		[015]		

These charts do not depict specifics of rhythm, register, and pitch overlap/simultaneity, but do convey the essential pitch structure of *Du*. Simply put, even though the entire work is generated by just five trichords—[013], [014], [015], [025], and [037]—the arrangement of pitches within each aggregate and the vertically sounding trichords they generate yields a highly varied musical surface. Placing my observations of the musical surface from Chapter Two

¹⁴⁷ The figures in this chapter label pitch classes according to C = 0.

within the context of Babbitt’s system of trichordal arrays reveals instances in which my hearing reflects the underlying structure and instances in which gestures do not align with the system.

Audible Structures

Certain salient musical features in *Du* are directly related to the underlying system. Many of the “echo” gestures, such as the *Viel tausend Du* descending pitch classes E – E-flat – D-flat {4, 3, 1} repeated in “Wankelmut,” are the result of array construction. In this instance, the array is derived entirely from an [013] trichord and preserves the same trichord ordered pitches in all four lines (Figure 3). My decision to highlight the pitch repetition of this particular array was not capricious; while other arrays (but not all) in *Du* share this characteristic, the close proximity of pitches and preservation of contour brought this gesture to my attention. After consideration of the text, I deemed this observation to be a particularly cogent representation of the poetic/dramatic situation, which, after all was the main thrust of my analysis.

Figure 3: Trichordal Array, “Wankelmut,” mm. 25-28

VOICE	4	3	1	11	0	2	8	6	5	7	9	10
PIANO 1	8	6	5	7	9	10	4	3	1	11	0	2
PIANO 2	11	0	2	4	3	1	7	9	10	8	6	5
PIANO 3	7	9	10	8	6	5	11	0	2	---	---	---

But does my perception of the *Viel tausend Du* equate to hearing and conceptualizing the pitch structure of the array? Perhaps not at first, but with my current knowledge of the array, I can now both hear and conceptualize at least one property of the array. I may even have been

expecting a continuation to the final {4, 3, 1} which was omitted from the lowest piano voice. This is the closest I have come to understanding what Babbitt meant by thinking a theoretical conception through with my “musical mind,” and it is largely due to the fact that compositional decisions drew my attention to these aspects of the array.

For another example, the subdued, other-worldly tone I sensed in “Traum” was largely a consequence of the triadic sound of the [037] trichords that generate the song’s array. I certainly heard the trichords, and I conceptualized their intervallic content as a new sound in the song cycle. Labeling my aural perceptions with the term “[037] trichord,” or the more sophisticated “array derived from [037] trichords,” replaced my original label of “triadic sounding,” but did not really alter how I already experienced the song. I had a firm understanding of what a [037] trichord could sound like, whereas I generally lack as solid an understanding when it comes to the possible sounds generated by other pitch-class sets. Perhaps further time spent comparing my hearing of the piece with the structural analysis could reveal additional associations between sound and theoretical label. However, like any abstraction, a given trichord can take on many different guises. Compare, for example, measures 44-48 of “Begegnung” with measures 57-63 of “Allmacht.” Both can be analyzed as trichordal arrays derived from [015] trichords and generating [014589] hexachords, but the resulting musical surfaces of these two songs are vastly different.

Analytical Distortion

While many of the vocal phrases clearly articulate Babbitt’s systematic use of trichords, at times the underlying trichordal array does not accurately reflect certain gestures and phrasing. In “Schwermut,” for example, the “sighing” dyads illustrate the meter and meaning of the poetic

text, but do not align with the standard segmentation into trichords. Aside from the initial measure of the song (m. 99) the vocal phrases never attack at the start of a structural trichord until the final *Tief stummen wir*. Awareness of this misalignment, it could potentially heighten the effect of the straining dyads, but little in the piano accompaniment suggests a strong accent at the beginning of each aggregate grouping.

Example 12: “Schwermut,” mm. 99-100

A similar situation in “Verzweifelt,” with its reduction from four to three compositional lines, makes for an interesting comparison. Here the vocal phrases suggest clear segmentation into tetrachords based on the poetic structure, whereas the piano part suggests a trichordal partitioning in measures 49-52. In terms of pitch content, aggregate formation takes place through tetrachordal combinatoriality between the voice and two piano lines, but compositionally, the piano does not follow this design, creating an audible four-against-three “partitioning hemiola.”¹⁴⁸ The simultaneous attack of voice and accompaniment at the end of measure 52, mentioned in the analysis as fitting for the text’s *Die Zeiten stehn*, stands out largely because it is an occasion of realignment between performers at the start of a new array.

¹⁴⁸ Morris and Alegant, “The Even Partitions in Twelve-Tone Music,” 97.

Example 13: “Verzweifelt,” mm. 49-53

The musical score for "Verzweifelt" (mm. 49-53) is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 49-50) shows a vocal line in 4/4 time with lyrics "Dro - ben schmet - tert ein" and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a trichordal structure in the right hand and a more active bass line. The second system (mm. 51-53) continues the vocal line with lyrics "grel-ler Stein Nacht grant Glas Die Zei - ten stehn" and the piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a prominent trichordal structure in the right hand and a bass line that moves between 4/4 and 3/4 time signatures. Dynamic markings include *mp*, *mf*, *p*, and *f*.

Generally speaking, trichords are not always gestures and gestures are not always trichords. Pitches often “overstep” their supposed array boundaries, one notable example being the vocal line at the end of “Wankelmut” (m. 32) carrying over into the piano introduction to “Begegnung.” Moreover, even without the constraints of a poetic text, Babbitt’s compositional choices of register, phrasing, placement of simultaneities, and attack contribute significantly to the realization of the work in ways not directly inferable from the underlying pitch structure.

I am not suggesting that this disparity between structural trichords and actual gestures or phrasing indicates a failure on the part of the composer or analyst. The question of what musical

elements the trichordal array neglects is not nearly as interesting as the question of how these two analytical perspectives—pre-compositional pitch structures and compositional phrasing—interact and how this contributes to an overall interpretation of the work. In the “Verzweifelt” example above, the conflicting phrasing was made explicit by the composer, in the “Schwermut” example, the disconnect was less clear. In both instances, knowledge of the array structure would augment the other text-music relationships discussed in Chapter Two.

In a response to George Perle’s similar comments about phrasing that contradicts the array, Babbitt writes

to term a “ritualistic obsession” the insistence on hexachordally related sets, even when “other types of segmentation” are exploited, is to disregard the fact that the establishing and maintaining of such a partition provide a norm against which other partitions can be measured and perceived in terms of degree of departure and deviation.¹⁴⁹

Babbitt’s reply echoes the previously mentioned statement that “the procedural sources, the technical traditions ... provide not only a point of entry but, eventually, the bases for determining the depth, extent, and genuineness of the work’s originality,”¹⁵⁰ and reflects Babbitt’s system-based analytical approach. But what can be achieved by comparing heard segmentation against the established, structural segmentation if no effort is made on the part of the composer to bring out the partitioning “norm”?

Serial Poetics

The question of how much weight should be given to the compositional structure is one that requires further study. Adopting a viewpoint similar to Perle, Ashby promotes a listening-based approach to modernist music precisely as a means of “escaping” compositional ideology

¹⁴⁹ Milton Babbitt, “A Reply to George Perle,” *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*, 145.

¹⁵⁰ See note 30.

and facilitating the development of alternative analyses.¹⁵¹ I, too, find the focus on listener subjectivities to be an appealing prospect and I welcome new interpretations of contemporary music facilitated by this approach. However, my goal is not necessarily to “escape” compositional ideology. I find the compositional system can still be a valuable aspect of analysis, not because it is how the composer intended the piece to be heard, but because it is part of the larger context surrounding the work. In studying a composer like Babbitt who has poured enormous energy into the development of serial theory, it seems disadvantageous to ignore the compositional system and structures of his music. The twelve-tone system is not the only context for approaching his music, but it is still pertinent.

In the case of my discussion of *Du*, starting with the listening-based analysis and then reading it against the structural analysis contributed both to my hearing of the musical surface (particularly in terms of the oscillation between dyad and trichordal phrasing) and to my interpretation of the ways in which the work portrays the poetic text (as seen with “Schwermut”). At the very least, a combination of the two perspectives expands the scope and effectiveness of my analysis.

Ultimately, I seek to generate an analytical approach that is a critical extension, not a rejection, of the current discourse on Babbitt’s music. By situating my hearing of a piece within Babbitt’s musical system, I can investigate the ways in which the theoretical model aligns with my aural perceptions and how these two perspectives concomitantly enhance my overall understanding of the work. In future analyses, I seek to balance the vivid interplay of compositional theory, mathematical modeling, and perceived meaning of musical gestures in

¹⁵¹ “Listening philosophies are less nefarious than compositional mindsets for the simple reason that they are based in connotation rather than ideas of denotation. There are half a dozen perspectives for hearing a composition, but only one compositional ideology (or, better said, one compositional perspective). Listening may play host to ideologies, but they are more fragmented, more arguable, more amenable ideologies.” Ashby, “Intention and Meaning in Modernist Music,” 35.

Babbitt's music. It is not my intention to rule out any methodologies; I am simply proposing that the current discourse could benefit from a thicker description that includes structural, gestural, and cultural aspects of the music *as music*. In doing so, it may be possible to generate a meaningful expression of serial poetics.

The interactions of *Ich* and *Du* do not just “resonate with the human condition in the mid-twentieth century,” but also with the discursive politics addressed throughout this paper. The songs cycle centers on themes of relationships and distance, issues central to my discussion of how scholars approach the music of Milton Babbitt.¹⁵² Indeed, the image of *Ich* gazing at an elusive, mystical *Du* all too closely matches an analyst's distanced attempts to possess and somehow uncover the inner-workings of a composition. The wonder of Babbitt's musical system and its multi-dimensional unfolding of the twelve-tone set makes for a desirous object to study.

Babbitt highlights the effect of the twelve-tone set, whose “structure pervades every aspect of the composition, from the most local ‘harmony’ ... through the structure of the total.” (*Allwege Du...*) Greg Sandow writes of the myriad possible associations, bestowing each note with “the power of an omen.” (*Wirr ... Wirren ... Wirrer...*) I found that my perceptions of the musical surface often times did not align with the musical structure. (*Ich Steine. Weit Glast Du!*) John Rahn found his analysis of *Du* to be “woefully incomplete.”¹⁵³ And for “music [that] strives, successfully or unsuccessfully, to make music as much as it can possibly be, rather than as little, the sense of verbal tentativeness and inadequacy is particularly saddening.” (*Beraupt, beraupt...*) By mapping the complex relationship of *Ich* and *Du* onto the equally complex relationships between composer, composition, analyst, and audience, perhaps a new analysis of

¹⁵² John Rahn first suggested this possible interpretation in “How Do You *Du* (by Milton Babbitt),” 79.

¹⁵³ Rahn, “How Do You *Du* (by Milton Babbitt),” 76.

Du could reflect an interpretation in which the interplay of aural perceptions and structural analysis helps convey the poetic text and shapes hearing and appreciation of Babbitt's composition.

II. Future Research

While this paper centers on analysis of one particular work, my approach to Babbitt's music suggests several other avenues of research. The interaction of compositional structures and the ways in which performers and listeners interpret the musical input (be it the notes on the page or the aural realization) can certainly be extended. For example, Babbitt often includes clues as to how to begin conceptualizing the unfolding of structures: with the clarinet solo beginning his *Composition for Four Instruments*, Babbitt isolated the opening trichord to delineate the other registrally-distinct trichords.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, Andrew Mead describes how Babbitt places the combinatorial row-pairs in *My Ends Are My Beginnings* above and below the clarinet's register break, which conveys to the performer a clear understanding of the work's underlying structure.¹⁵⁵

Because, as Mead says, "music's path to the mind is inevitably through the body,"¹⁵⁶ my discussions of gesture and perception would certainly be augmented by further study of aspects of performance in Babbitt's works. Contemporary music places new demands on the performer, and by "bringing to life" these compositions, virtuosic performers are in a unique position to offer insights into the play of musical surface and structures.¹⁵⁷ Further, observations of (and

¹⁵⁴ See Babbitt, *Words about Music*, 28-29.

¹⁵⁵ Andrew Mead, "Bodily Hearing: Physiological Metaphors and Musical Understanding," *Journal of Music Theory* 43, no. 1 (Spring 1999), 12.

¹⁵⁶ Mead, "Bodily Hearing," 15.

¹⁵⁷ See Daphne Leong and Elizabeth McNutt, "Virtuosity in Babbitt's *Lonely Flute*," *Music Theory Online* 11, no. 1 (March 2005).

conversations with) performers closely associated with Babbitt can help shed light onto the composer's aesthetic values, as well as provide vital information leading toward a reception history of post-war Modernism. Ethnographic studies of contemporary music groups would also be an integral part of a study of Babbitt's academic milieu.

The historiography of post-war music remains tenuous, and studies of historical context and reception of this music are essential components.¹⁵⁸ Despite being armed with the latest critical and cultural theories, scholars have been slow to engage much of the modern music scene, particularly Babbitt and the "Princeton School" of serial composition. Attention is given to Babbitt's extensions of serial theory and, of course, his "Who Cares?" article, but comparatively little attention is given to the music. While his "scientific" language and "scientific" method remain essential for creating "meaningful" discourse on music, and his codification of serial theory will continue to inspire the development of new theoretical constructs and analytical models, limiting the discourse on Babbitt to these "academic" endeavors fails to capture his monumental role in the formation of a contemporary American art music scene. Distinct from their Darmstadt counterparts, Babbitt's compositions are paragons of the American Modernist aesthetic—embodiments of the post-war zeitgeist that heralded scientific ingenuity and artistic exploration.

McClary argues for situating a study of Babbitt's music within the context of post-war Modernist musical culture, a "historical human artifact" reflecting the aesthetic goals and ideologies of mid-century academia. Her use of "artifact" here is interesting, in light of my critique of a discourse that often treats works as "artifacts" to be analyzed. The difference between studying a work as a product of a historical context and studying a work as a product of

¹⁵⁸ See Leo Treitler, "The Present as History," *Music and the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1989), 95-156.

a composer's compositional system is perhaps not as clear as we would like, for the analytical discourse and compositional systems are also products of twentieth-century political and cultural history.

Discussing aesthetics and meaning in the music of a composer who supposedly denies the validity of such a discourse may seem counterintuitive,¹⁵⁹ but when framed within a cultural study of how students, performers, and audience members perceived and interpreted his works, the intrinsic excitement and vitality of his innovative music will surely begin to surface. I am not looking somehow to “redeem” serial music, but rather to “read between the lines” of Babbitt’s theory and navigate the musical language of his compositions, in order to investigate the goals and artistic values of post-war American musical culture.

As my analysis of *Du* has begun to demonstrate, the discourse on Babbitt’s music can benefit from an acknowledgment of the inherent individuality (and subjectivity) of the composer, the composition, and the analyst. Addressing musical meaning, compositional theory, and cultural theory can broaden analytic perspectives and offer new readings of Babbitt’s music. And for a music that strives to be “as much as it can possibly be,”¹⁶⁰ this seems only appropriate.

¹⁵⁹ Babbitt claims that he is not “allergic” to claims of beauty in his music, provided reasons are given. Guck, “Rehabilitating the Incurable,” 58, n. 5. Along a similar line, I argue that his music is not “immune” to critical and hermeneutic claims.

¹⁶⁰ Babbitt, “On *Relata I*,” 247.

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